

WOMEN
in the
JEWISH COMMUNITY

Review & Recommendations

Judy Goodkin & Judith Citron

**Women
In
The
Jewish
Community**

**Review
and
Recommendations**

Rosalind Preston O.B.E.

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First published in 1994 in Great Britain by

Women in the Community
Adler House
Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HN

Second Impression 8/94

ISBN 0-9523543-1-4

**Design and Layout by
Marriott Design and Productions, London NW4**

Printed in Great Britain by The Book Factory, London N7

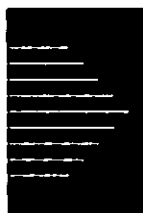
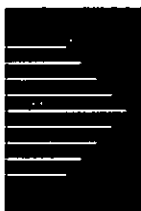


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Foreword

The announcement of the “Women in the Community” project, initiated by Chief Rabbi, Dr. Jonathan Sacks, provoked a variety of responses - surprise that his first major initiative on taking office was to focus on the concerns of women; scepticism that this would be yet another exercise in futility; approval that the invitation extended to Jewish women of all affiliations and, above all, hope that the vital issues concerning women and Halachah would be addressed anew.

Would the Review carry forward and build on the prodigious endeavours and wide ranging consultations undertaken by many outstanding British Jewish women during previous decades?

As a result of the long process of investigation, exploration, discussion and debate, the agenda of women’s concerns has indeed been brought to the forefront of community consciousness. Individual women have responded in their thousands, seizing this unique opportunity to explore their own hopes and expectations, concerns and fears, not just for themselves, their immediate families and their local communities, but also out of a strong desire to safeguard and strengthen the wellbeing of Jewish life in this country - to guarantee Jewish continuity.

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that a very large number of women did not take up the invitation to participate. Was it disinterest, complacency, satisfaction with the status quo or a lack of awareness? I cannot be sure since there is no way to measure or compare the level of response with any previous similar exercise.

I quickly discovered that, prior to the beginning of the project, no data whatsoever existed on Jewish women in the U.K. It became obvious therefore that the work of the Review could not be completed without addressing that issue.

Consequently, in 1993, the Community Research Unit of the Board of Deputies of British Jews was commissioned to design a questionnaire based on the wide range of subjects already raised by women at their meetings.

The results of this penetrating and comprehensive document are contained in the “Women in the Jewish Community - Survey Report”. I am especially grateful to Marlana Schmool, Director of the CSU and Dr. Stephen Miller, Dean of the School of Social

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Sciences at City University, together with their supporting staff, who undertook this pioneering project with such enthusiasm and single-mindedness.

It must be pointed out that this unique piece of research was only made possible through the generous sponsorship of the Mina and Everard Goodman Foundation which I acknowledge with sincere appreciation and grateful thanks.

The “Women in the Community” Review has required immense dedication and motivation on the part of many people. It is also a supreme example of volunteerism and generosity of spirit. Throughout the months I have turned for advice, guidance, practical help and professional input to both longstanding and newly acquired colleagues, women leading very busy lives at work in the voluntary and professional sectors, inside and outside the Jewish community. Not once was I refused co-operation or assistance. I am also most grateful to their male counterparts working in the synagogues, Batei Din, welfare and advice agencies, research centres, national and local voluntary organisations and youth and student movements, who were willing to provide up-to-date information and practical assistance.

This same support and co-operation has been enjoyed by the Regional teams. Their individual reports, of outstanding quality, will undoubtedly prove to be of major significance and relevance in the long term planning of community programmes around the country.

Projects of this nature require not only time, energy and total commitment, but also finance. The Review is indebted to a small number of individual donors, men as well as women, who demonstrated their belief in the project by their generosity. Funding and administrative assistance was also sought, and gratefully received, from Jewish Representative Councils, Trusts and Foundations and, in one instance, a Regional Authority.

Special thanks go to Mr. Clive Marks and the Ashdown Trust who provided me and my secretary, Thea Samuels, with an administrative base; a comfortable office and a warm welcome in his extremely busy premises in New Cavendish Street.

Throughout the work of the Review there have been frequent discussions with Rabbis and members of Batei Din and I thank them all for their co-operation and interest. To Dr. Jeremy Phillips, personal thanks for his expert assistance on a number of technical details and to my own Rabbi, Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, for his caring support at all times.

The working party is indebted to Dayan Ehrentreu, head of the London Beth Din, and halachic consultant to the Review, who permitted easy access to the Beth Din administration and met with working party members whenever requested. I thank Dayan Ehrentreu for his scholarly guidance on all halachic matters. Ever mindful of the Chief Rabbi’s original instruction, that the process of the Review “had to be conducted in continuous partnership with halachic authorities to replace confrontation with true dialogue and mutual understanding”, I am confident that we fulfilled that obligation.

From the outset the working party has been spiritually sustained and supported by the Chief Rabbi, whose personal commitment has been a constant source of inspiration. I am particularly indebted to him for allowing me total freedom of action though ever conscious of his watchful gaze!

My feet have been kept on the straight and narrow by Jonathan Kestenbaum, Executive Director to the Chief Rabbi's Office. His administrative skills guaranteed the smooth running of the Review mechanism and, at our frequent meetings, his sound advice and good humour have helped me to overcome many hurdles.

The writing of the report has not been easy. During the two years of the enquiry a massive amount of material was collected. Although coming fresh to the project writer Judy Goodkin, together with researcher Dr. Judith Citron, have produced a succinct resume of this dense mass, neither adding nor taking away, recording only the messages contained in the documentation. Occasionally the report draws on the results of the statistical survey. In this way we are able to highlight or contrast views expressed by women attending the meetings with the opinions of women who responded to the questionnaire.

I am deeply grateful to Judy Goodkin and Judith Citron for the way in which they tackled this very difficult job. We have worked in close harmony with a clear understanding of our joint responsibilities - to allow the voices of all those who participated in the Review to be recorded.

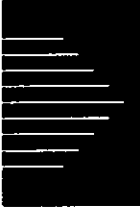
Finally, I wish to express my feelings to the members of my working party. We have shared a most incredible experience; frequently difficult and always demanding, sometimes frustrating and often confusing. We have also shared personal joys and sorrows, the birth of babies, the Bar/Bat Mitzvot of children and grandchildren, beautiful weddings and painfully sad bereavements. Together, we have overcome setbacks and difficulties and finish, as we began, committed to each other and to the Jewish women in this country.

This report is now handed to Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks for his consideration and in turn to the entire community - synagogal bodies, Representative Councils, voluntary and welfare organisations, educational centres and youth movements.

“Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act”.
(Proverbs 3:27)

Rosalind Preston O.B.E.

Chairperson to the Review.



Methodology I: Collecting the Material

Aims and Objectives

From its inception the aim of the Review was to reach out and embrace the concerns and opinions of Jewish women irrespective of their background.

“I will be seeking the support and co-operation of all Jewish women, from all synagogue backgrounds and none, and of all ages, who are concerned about the welfare of our community”.

These were the words of Rosalind Preston, reported on the front page of the Jewish Chronicle in February, 1992 when the Women in the Community initiative was launched by Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks.

Methodology

1. Initial Steps

Widespread national and local radio and press publicity in newspapers, magazines, community and women’s organisational newsletters was achieved throughout the timespan of the Review. In addition, women were invited to make their voices heard by responding to an explanatory pamphlet, of which 80,000 copies were distributed through Jewish community centres, synagogues, doctors’ surgeries, health clinics, libraries, shops and school notice boards, in large and small communities alike, throughout Great Britain. An administrative office was set up which also dealt with the many hundreds of letters and telephone calls received from women in response to the Review invitation.

2. Task Forces and Methods of Research

Rosalind Preston divided the Women in the Community project into five sections inviting Convenors and Rapporteurs in London and the major Jewish centres around the country to head small teams of women looking at Education, Synagogue and

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Religious Matters, Social Issues, the Family and Get and Agunah. Special interest groups were formed within the taskforces so that they could go straight to the heart of subjects known to be of concern, but women were also encouraged to set the agenda themselves. The remit for the taskforces was to gather information and meet on a regular basis to submit findings and discuss progress. Convenors and Rapporteurs in London attended monthly update meetings with Rosalind Preston, who also visited the regions whenever possible both to introduce the Review personally and to keep contact with local activity.

As part of a training programme workshops were set up for all taskforce members to extend knowledge of practical skills in gathering and communicating information objectively. The content of the workshops organised and run by professionals covered attending and listening skills, responding skills, information gathering and working in groups. As well as the training sessions women were also provided with guidelines containing useful pointers to assist them in conducting group discussions.

Each team set about collecting information from professionals in the community but the main thrust of their work was to make direct contact with as many women as possible. Women attended the meetings in response to the publicity, through personal invitation or by a method termed 'snowballing', one woman inviting another. Some meetings were one-to-one, some half-a-dozen and others comprised attendance of more than a hundred. The larger meetings were the ones at which men were sometimes present.

Meetings were held in private homes as well as community halls. At large gatherings, following a broad based introduction, small groups were formed for 'brainstorming' as well as discussion of specific subjects. Although the issues discussed were diverse and often provocative, with women representing virtually every type of background, age group, perspective and approach, there was a common thread running through the discussions. Every effort was made to ensure that the ambience was welcoming and informal, the participants were free to set the agenda and all were assured of confidentiality. Names of participants were never sought, the emphasis was on the recording of opinions and concerns of importance in their lives, of the lives of their family or their community.

It is appropriate to emphasize that confidentiality was considered of vital importance as many issues discussed were of an extremely private and personal nature. It was therefore essential for participants to be able to trust taskforce members.

The women who comprised the taskforces, drawn from a wide range of affiliations, acted in a voluntary capacity each one possessing expertise which she was able to put to the benefit of the Review. The background of the volunteers was varied and encompassed those with high-level professional skills in education, social work, the law and medicine. A considerable number of taskforce members possess training in counselling skills and many have years of experience in community work occupying

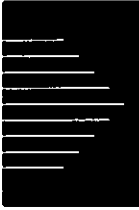
responsible high profile leadership positions, often with particular interest in women's issues.

3. Transcripts

Notes were kept at all meetings, the salient points of which were discussed at regular taskforce meetings to ensure the authenticity of the way in which views were represented to the editors of the final report. Throughout the stages of writing the report drafts of each section were submitted to the taskforces for comments, suggestions and approval.

4. Omissions

There are gaps in the final document such as the need to hear more from the under-privileged, the disadvantaged and those women who feel peripheral or alienated from mainstream community life. The middle class composition of the taskforce members must also be acknowledged. All these factors are reflections of a fragmented community not only divided into different social and income groups, educational and religious divides, but also by age and marital status. These are just some of the reasons why the report should be thought of as a first step. The hope is that the concerns expressed by the many thousands of women who took the opportunity to participate will find a sympathetic and positive response.



Methodology II: Writing the Report

The central challenge facing Judy Goodkin, the writer and Judith Citron, the adviser in the writing phase, was how to give shape to the thousands of voices - that they had not heard themselves - but whose echoes rang out in the detailed submissions from the length and breadth of Britain.

The 'Life Cycle' idea - proposed by Judith Citron - was a creative solution which offered the writer an organic unifying structure. By tracking the biological and spiritual growth of every woman, each milestone could justifiably stake its own claim to a place within the whole and find its natural home.

The first step was to meet each of the five core London-based Task Forces in turn and through them, draw closer to the vast, dense and often complex body of material. Thus, London's data became the foundations and primary source for the Review. In cases where an entry is not ascribed to a particular location, it can be assumed that the views emanated from London and found general agreement elsewhere.

Next, a chart was devised, plotting all regional variations at each stage of the life cycle and highlighting their relative positions to the core material. Geographical distinctions and special needs could then be identified for extra emphasis within the text and any uniformity seen at a glance.

Throughout the work in progress, all team members were invited to suggest changes in the tone and volume of the subject entries; their ongoing and constructive input has been invaluable in creating a faithful, honest and representative document.

Designer's Note:

In Chapters 1-6, paragraphs that appear in italics indicate material taken from the "Women in the Jewish Community - Survey Report".



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Rosalind Preston O.B.E.

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Elizabeth Shapiro
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Recommendations and Findings

Paragraphs that appear in italics indicate “Findings”.

A Religious and Marital Identity - We Recommend:

A1 Preparation for Marriage and Family Life

A1.1 The creation of new, and up-dating of existing courses and resources - books, tapes, videos - on preparation for marriage and family life, covering all aspects of personal relationships, to be used in every section of the Jewish educational system both formal and informal. Attractive and accessible programmes for all age groups must provide a clear understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a Jewish marriage.

A1.2 That discussion and guidance on potential problems and difficulties be offered to all couples contemplating marriage, led by qualified professionals, as part of “preparation for marriage”.

A1.3 Parenting: The provision of programmes on parenting skills and access to professional guidance for families at times of crisis.

A1.4 Promotion of the services provided by the Jewish Marriage Council by an injection of additional resources and clarification of the organisation’s aims and objectives.

A2 Single Parents

A2.1 A cohesive, positive approach by all communal and religious bodies towards single mothers and their children, paying particular attention to their social, financial and emotional needs.

A2.2 That members of congregations actively reach out to and support single mothers experiencing poverty and alienation from the rest of the community, and recognise their deep feelings of frustration on behalf of their children.

A3 Adoption of Non-Jewish Children

A3.1 A review of present procedures relating to adoption by Orthodox Batei Din, with a view to providing greater access to information, clearer guidelines and more sensitive support from the relevant religious authorities throughout the adoption process.

A4 Inter-marriage

A4.1 That, in an attempt to combat the ever increasing incidence of intermarriage, overall plans for young members of the community should include an educational programme in Israel which will enhance pride in Jewish identity, culture, history and community.

A4.2 That counselling services be made available to individuals and families affected by intermarriage.

A5 Conversion

A5.1 The introduction of common standards for conversion worldwide.

A5.2 The establishment of a bureau for information and counselling for prospective converts to Orthodox Judaism, under the auspices of the Chief Rabbi's office, staffed by professionals and trained volunteers.

A5.3 That uniformity of procedures and conditions be introduced in respect of conversion of a non-Jewish adopted child applicable and acceptable in every Jewish community around the world including Israel.

A5.4 That women converting to Judaism be offered all possible assistance and support together with the finest educational opportunities.

A5.5 That wherever possible each prospective convert be guided and supported by a "mentor" within the setting of all synagogues.

A5.6 That there should always be a strong liaison between the convert's tutor and the Rabbi of the community with which she is associated.

A6 Singles

A6.1 The promotion of a nationwide independent, self-financing, data-based introduction agency, offering an affordable and professional service to all Jewish singles.

A6.2 That all religious and communal bodies actively welcome singles whether young, widowed or divorced - by the creation of an atmosphere of inclusivism - encouraging them to integrate into and participate more fully in the life of the community by ensuring their involvement in religious and communal affairs at all levels.

A6.3 A clear community policy decision be taken to improve and increase the provision of community centres with appropriate social facilities for the unattached of all age groups.

A6.4 That community organisations offer special rates to single women who may need financial assistance to maintain their Jewish identity.

A6.5 Encouragement and assistance be offered to single women wishing to create self-help groups.

B Religious Practice in Traditional Orthodoxy - We Recommend:

B1 Provision of alternative forms of service for women and men

Alternative forms of service are wanted by many women on Shabbat and Festival mornings: alternative minyanim; explanatory services; briefer services followed by learning opportunities.

B2 Bat Mitzvah/Bat Chayil

There is a need for enhanced and up-graded ceremonies, and positive acknowledgement of a Bat Mitzvah celebrant, agreed by the Chief Rabbi and acceptable to all Rabbis, to ensure that all girls have the same opportunities and achieve a real sense of belonging.

B2.1 That guidelines on various alternative services and ceremonies be published for the use of synagogues and parents.

B3 Succot

B3.1 That guidance be given to all synagogues on the participation of women in the mitzvah of Arba Minim.

B4 Simchat Torah

B4.1 That guidance be given on women's participation.

B5 Special Ceremonies

B5.1 The introduction of special ceremonies to enable women to participate - on their own behalf - to mark outstanding achievements, such ceremonies to be held at the end of the Shabbat morning service or at other appropriate times.

B6 Women and Prayer

B6.1 The publication of special prayers -

- a) Following childbirth
- b) For the loss of a baby: There is need for special prayers in all appropriate services, e.g. Yizkor, for the loss of a baby through miscarriage and stillbirth.
- c) For the loss of a young child, particularly under the age of one month when there is no Shiva.
- d) A ceremony for the naming of a baby daughter in which the mother can participate.

B7 Mourning

B7.1 Guidelines on women's participation in religious observance, such as the saying of Kaddish. Where this is not possible, special emphasis should be paid to the need for women suffering bereavement to have available other and equivalent modes of religious expression.

B8 Bereavement

B8.1 Funerals: The publication of guidelines and communal education on the issue of women's attendance at funerals.

B8.2 Shiva: That Rabbis and lay leaders be more sensitive to the needs and feelings of women mourners and comforters at a Shiva. Clear guidelines for women mourners are required to create uniformity of procedures in a house of mourning and provision for women who wish to pray.

B8.3 Yahrzeit: That guidance be given on religious options open to women besides the lighting of a Yahrzeit candle.

B9 Education on Women's Obligations

In the absence of men, or in the presence of men who are not members of their household, or who may not wish or be able to perform the mitzvah, women's obligations require clarification regarding Kiddush, Zimmun, Havdalah, Bensching Gomel, Birchat Habanim and Hamotzei.

B9.1 That there be written guidelines for all situations involving women in ritual and prayer, including key events in the life cycle. These guidelines to be supported by public dissemination of the information by Rabbis and teachers.

B9.2 That special effort be made to educate women concerning head covering and modest dress when attending synagogue services and wedding ceremonies.

B10 Mikveh

B10.1 Early and sensitive education of girls and boys regarding the use of mikveh and Taharat Ha'Mishpachah. Women should receive support and encouragement particularly when this mitzvah has not been inherited from their mothers.

B10.2 Attendants: That attendants be trained to deal tactfully and sensitively with all women, especially those who are unsure of the procedures.

B10.3 Location: That mikvaot be located in well lit, convenient and safe areas, but not in too close proximity to a synagogue.

B10.4 Consultation: That women be involved in the consultation process as to the desirability of investing in a new mikveh as opposed to the refurbishment of an existing one.

C Synagogues - Membership, Management, Seating and Access We Recommend:

C1 Synagogue Membership and Procedures

The United Synagogue is currently addressing the issue of women in management within its constituent synagogues. However, in the Regions each Orthodox Synagogue operates under its own rules. There are also widespread variations and inconsistencies in regard to women's rights to membership and election to Councils which cause much concern and dissatisfaction.

C1.1 Synagogue Membership: That women be made aware of all procedures in order to become full voting members of their synagogues, and that guidelines should be issued to empower women, whether married or single, to be accorded full membership of all central Orthodox synagogues, in their own right.

C1.2 Membership Fees: That people under 25, senior citizens and single women be offered preferential rates.

C1.3 Junior Membership: The expansion of Junior membership schemes following Bar/Bat Mitzvah, through a nominal fee, to actively involve young people in the life of the synagogue.

C1.4 That women should be accorded equal opportunities to serve in all areas of synagogue management, wherever Halachah permits.

C1.5 That certain members of the synagogue be nominated to identify newcomers and offer every assistance, to make them feel comfortable and welcome in the synagogue.

C2 Seating

The seating arrangement most favoured by women who wish to move away from the gallery setting is that of men and women sitting on the same level, separated by a mechitzah running down the length of the synagogue.

C2.1 That when women are unable to climb stairs, provision should be made for seating downstairs, where they can see and hear satisfactorily. The disabled and elderly should be made to feel included in the service and comfortable and wanted in the synagogue at all times.

C3 Mechitzah

There is a need for clear definition of the term and clarification of its purpose.

C3.1 That a mechitzah should permit women to see and hear the service in comfort.

C4 Architecture and Design

C4.1 That women be included amongst those responsible for the planning, design and refurbishment of synagogue premises.

C5 Eruv

C5.1 That the needs of the disabled and of young families be recognised and aided by the construction of an Eruv wherever appropriate.

D Community - We Recommend:

D1 Dialogue

The Review process created an opportunity for women across the community, regardless of age, religious affiliation and marital status, for an excellent cross-fertilisation of ideas and expertise and an increased sense of understanding and mutual respect.

D1.1 That the dialogue of women throughout the community be continued.

D2. The Establishment of a Standing Committee on Women's Issues

D2.1 That this Committee act as a point of reference in all future matters relating to women. The Standing Committee would be in a position to elicit women's opinions on a wide range of issues and to make recommendations to the appropriate religious authority and/or community organisation.

D3 Kashrut

D3.1 That there be worldwide standards and uniform procedures for Kashrut.

D3.2 That clearer labelling be produced for all kosher products.

D3.3 That more publicity be given by the Batei Din to the availability of permitted non-supervised food and household items for use on Pesach and throughout the year.

D4 Community Ombudsman

D4.1 The introduction of an Ombudsman to deal with appeals and complaints from people who believe that they have been badly treated by any section of a synagogue body - from local synagogue staff to the Beth Din.

D5 Women and Religious Ritual and Practice

It should be recognised that further positive involvement of women in religious ritual and practice will lead to greater participation of the whole family as this is often determined by the mother's attitude and practices - particularly relevant and important in single-parent families.

D5.1 It is therefore recommended that more ways be found within Halachah to involve women in the spiritual life of the community.

E Social and Welfare Issues - We Recommend:

E1 Community Centres

E1.1 That the concept of non-denominational Jewish Community Centres should be further explored to meet the cultural, social, educational and recreational needs of the community.

E2 "Yellow Pages"

E2.1 The production of a Jewish "Yellow Pages" Directory in each region, a comprehensive document, to list all community/welfare services, social groups and activities, special interest organisations, etc. to be widely available within the community and particularly to Rabbis, G.P.'s working in Jewish areas, social workers, community nurses, health visitors, counsellors, schools and libraries. To be regularly updated and financed by advertising space.

E3 Transport

E3.1 That additional coach services for visits to cemeteries and major community events be provided, with wider publicity to existing arrangements, paying particular attention to the special needs of the disabled and older members of the community.

E4 Access

E4.1 That proper consideration be given to the needs of people with disabilities regarding access to and facilities within all communal buildings.

E5 Bereavement Support

E5.1 That, whilst also acknowledging the value of bereavement counselling, each Synagogue enlists a group of men and women willing to offer immediate friendship and support to bereaved congregants.

E5.2 Jewish version of CRUSE: Encouragement for self-help networks for the bereaved.

E6 Home/Hospital Visiting

E6.1 A strengthening of community arrangements to identify and address the needs of the sick and elderly.

E7 Child Care

E7.1 That community facilities, including synagogue premises, be made available at an affordable rate to enable working mothers and single parents to leave their

children in a safe and caring Jewish environment. Provision for care after school hours and during school holidays is of particular importance.

E7.2 That older women, with time available and a desire to be involved, be gainfully employed as “Jewish grannies” offering fulfilling part-time occupation and ameliorating staffing difficulties; that training and some payment be offered and funds set aside by the community for this purpose.

E8 Volunteers

E8.1 That professional training would enhance the standing of volunteers in the community. It would also raise standards and morale, and thereby encourage more people to volunteer their services and feel valued members of the community.

E9 Carers of Children with Special Needs

E9.1 That the appropriate Jewish agencies provide lay and professional community members with training to understand the needs of these carers. Help and counselling should be readily available to families with a child/children with special needs.

E10 Carers

E10.1 That local studies be carried out to identify carers, the majority of whom are women, and that encouragement be given to self-help support groups.

E11 Women who Suffer Abuse

In view of the pervasive myth of “the happy Jewish home”, many women trapped in violent and abusive situations are reluctant to reveal the facts.

E11.1 Women who Suffer Abuse: That the National JWA (Jewish Women’s Aid) be encouraged and supported in a programme of education in the community and enabled to develop and expand plans to help women affected by abuse.

E12 Health

E12.1 That increased provision be made in all Jewish schools for children with mild and moderate learning difficulties, with appropriate support from national and Jewish educational and welfare agencies.

E12.2 That improved health education be provided to Jewish children through synagogues, youth clubs, community centres, schools and Hebrew classes, given by trained professionals, as part of the regular Jewish educational programme. Fuller information is required for girls on the subject of the menstrual cycle.

E12.3 Sex education: That specific provision be made in the Jewish day school system for sex education, including information on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

E12.4 Drug misuse: That Jewish educators in the formal and informal sectors liaise with the Jewish AIDS Trust and appropriate drug agencies to educate the Jewish community on this increasing danger.

E12.5 Tay Sachs and other genetic diseases affecting Jewish people: That a feasibility study be undertaken on the advisability of a nationwide screening programme and the setting up of a central information bureau and database.

F Education - We Recommend:

F1 Family Education

F1.1 That the importance of family education be fully recognised and that programmes for family education be developed and well supported. Learning together as a family should be a major focus within individual communities.

F1.2 That synagogue services become a positive educational experience. Educational opportunities and resources should be made appropriate and easily accessible to meet the needs of women in following and understanding the synagogue service. Every Jewish educational programme should include "Following the Service".

F2 Hebrew Language

F2.1 That, as the Hebrew language is a basic source of Jewish identity and a vital tool for furthering Jewish study, both learning and teaching Hebrew be promoted in a wide range of educational settings.

F3 Education for Girls

F3.1 That girls should be offered every opportunity to gain Jewish knowledge. Equality in education is imperative.

F4 Educational Organisations

F4.1 That organisations which provide educational opportunities co-operate and work together rather than duplicate efforts.

F4.2 That a main body co-ordinates and directs educational initiatives in order to suggest, implement and oversee programmes of learning in an efficient and cost effective manner.

F5 Shiurim

Whilst there is a need for basic/practical shiurim for women, there is also a need for shiurim which will help women grapple with issues that are directed specifically at women's concerns, e.g. the obligation of a woman to perform mitzvot and to study Torah, women in the synagogue, etc.

F5.1 That three of the strands of women's studies that should be targeted for development are Limmudei Kodesh, Jewish culture and Hebrew language, as basic and necessary tools for a sound Jewish education.

F6 Women's Adult Education

F6.1 That a greatly extended Jewish educational programme be on offer for women, delivered with a full range of options, enabling women to gain access to Halachah, and a true understanding of their own potential for ritual, study, and prayer.

F6.2 That women be encouraged to enter the highest levels of Jewish learning through the provision of appropriate courses for the achievement of this aim.

F7 Use of Technology in Religious Education

F7.1 The production of audio and video tapes, for purchase or loan, on prayer, ritual and other religious matters, which are particularly requested by women who wish to learn in the privacy of their own homes and are unable or unwilling to attend study groups.

F8 Women Teachers

F8.1 That the teaching of Jewish Studies be given higher status and that parents and schools should encourage girls to enter the teaching profession. Confident women teachers become excellent role models for Jewish girls.

F9 Jewish Educators

F9.1 That the urgent need for suitably qualified and charismatic Jewish educators in communities around the country be addressed.

F10 Informal Education

F10.1 Recognition of the important effect of cultural education on Jewish identity as provided by Women's and Zionist organisations, and the vital influence of Jewish assemblies and Jewish societies in mainstream schools.

F11 Special Needs

Since the Local Education Authorities may now take into account the denominational needs within a statement of special needs, Jewish women along with other members of the community must be aware of children with special needs and understand what their needs are. Parents should encourage schools and Jewish institutions to have an integrative policy towards special needs.

F11.1 That Jewish schools accept children with a statement of special needs so that they may be kept within a Jewish educational setting.

G Rabbis, Rebbetzins and the Batei Din - We Recommend:

G1 Congregational Rabbis

G1.1 That women be involved in the selection process in order to ensure that their needs are considered.

G2 Rabbis and Professional Development

G2.1 That Rabbis attend regular in-service training courses in order to enhance the quality of their pastoral care.

G2.2 That Rabbis and their wives receive professional training in the acquisition of and improvement in communication and counselling skills, with particular reference to inter-personal relationships relating to the many modern family problems with which they are presented.

G3 Training Programmes

G3.1 That mandatory attendance at training courses be arranged by a recognised Jewish religious authority e.g. Jews College, and that such training be included in the curriculum of all rabbinical and ministerial students prior to qualification.

G3.2 That, in line with other professional self-regulatory bodies, standards of professional competence be set and maintained by appropriate rabbinical authorities.

G3.3 That courses for Rabbis should include “women’s needs/issues”.

G4 Pastoral role

G4.1 That a clearer definition of the pastoral role of the Rabbi and the Rebbetzin be made to narrow the gap in expectation between congregant and minister.

G5 Role of Rebbetzins

G5.1 That the Rabbi’s wife be given the choice of whether or not she wishes to work for the community.

G5.2 That, if she wishes to be involved, she is given a formal contract of employment and adequate training and remuneration for the services she undertakes.

G5.3 That the services or roles she is not able to undertake be advertised so that they may be undertaken by others.

G6 Batei Din

It should be remembered that contact with a Beth Din usually occurs at a highly-charged emotional time in a person’s life.

G6.1 That flexible user-friendly office hours be introduced, i.e. evening appointments, e.g. for engaged couples to provide documents to the Registrar, if they are unable to take time off work during the day.

G6.2 That to promote greater understanding and co-operation between the Batei Din and petitioners, better communication methods be implemented to prevent unnecessary delays and feelings of anxiety and distress.

H Get and Agunah - We Recommend:

H1 Monitoring of Gittin

H1.1 That a Dayan be appointed to the London Beth Din with the single designated task of constantly monitoring and following-up cases of unresolved gittin.

H2 Pre-Nuptial Agreement

H2.1 That the pre-nuptial agreement, as announced by the Chief Rabbi, will now be a requirement for the solemnizing of all marriages in synagogues under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi.

H3 Coercion

H3.1 That the Chief Rabbi should issue guidelines on what is judged to be acceptable pressure to grant a Get.

H4 Get Counselling Service

H4.1 That a professional and appropriately funded Get Counselling Service should be established as a matter of priority in London and in the major centres of Jewish population.

H5 Jewish Family Mediation Service

H5.1 That a Jewish Family Mediation Service should be established in line with the recommendations of the Government's Green Paper.

H6 Training of Rabbis

H6.1 That both in preparation for communal service and as part of their on-going training, Rabbis should receive adequate instruction on Get counselling in situations of marital breakdown. Also, as an essential aspect of their pastoral care, Rabbis should be required to have a working knowledge of how best to refer couples for appropriate professional guidance.

H7 Recalcitrant Husbands

H7.1 That a recalcitrant husband should forfeit privileges within the community. Synagogues should be encouraged to deny congregational honours to such a husband

until he grants a Get. Communal organisations should likewise be encouraged to deny such individuals positions of leadership. Synagogues and communal bodies should be encouraged to include such provisions within their constitutions.

H7.2 Naming: That ways should be considered of publicising the names of recalcitrant husbands who unreasonably refuse to grant a Get.

H8 Unacceptable Practice

It is recognised that in certain cases Get or Chalitzah is withheld until there has been substantial payment of money or until unacceptable conditions have been agreed upon.

H8.1 That this practice is publicised as abhorrent and be denounced as alien to Jewish ethics.

H9 Administration

H9.1 That the whole system in which Get applications are processed should be computerised.

H9.2 That a straightforward guide for litigants explaining Get procedures should be drawn up and sent immediately upon application.

H9.3 That consideration should be given to ways of standardising and reducing the costs of obtaining a Get.

H10 Civil Law

H10.1 That further attempts should be made to seek legislation restricting the granting of a Decree Absolute of Divorce until all religious bars on remarriage have been removed.

H11 Halachah

H11.1 That the Chief Rabbi and Dayanim are respectfully urged to convene a gathering of worldwide halachic authorities with the courage and authority to decide how to implement all possibilities within Halachah which can prevent the occurrence of the status of Agunah.

H12 Mamzerut

It has been revealed that there are many cases of considerable distress resulting from the status of mamzer being perpetuated through the generations; the outcome of an Agunah being left with no option other than to make a subsequent union outside Orthodoxy.

The present situation relating to Agunot has, particularly over the past two decades, resulted in the birth of thousands of children halachically deemed mamzerim.



The Early Years

The Birth of a Baby

“I really wanted to say something after my baby was delivered - but I didn’t even know if such a Berachah existed”.

A large number of affiliated women countrywide reported in the meetings a profound wish to express thanks to God at key events in their life and the lives of their families. Yet many were unclear about the mechanisms for giving thanks following the birth of a baby. From the range of views canvassed, it would appear that Birchat Ha’Gomel is the best known thanksgiving formula of a number of options available to women at this time. While several other prayers do exist, they occupy a position of relative obscurity, with many women remaining completely unaware of the alternatives open to them.

Yet, despite many women’s familiarity with Birchat Ha’Gomel, there was deep dissatisfaction over the use of an all-purpose thanksgiving benediction, not on the grounds of its content but chiefly by virtue of the company it keeps. Gomel, the traditional expression of gratitude for deliverance from life-threatening circumstances, may be applied by those who have survived road accidents, crossed the sea or wilderness or been released from prison. Given that maternal mortality during childbirth is a relatively rare event in late twentieth century medicine, women consider Gomel too blunt an instrument to convey adequately their sense of joy and wonder at the emergence of a new life.

Birth of a Girl

“Our girls are disadvantaged from birth.”

Such was the desire among mainstream Orthodox women for a meaningful ritual event - over and above the mother’s prayers - to mark the arrival of a baby girl, that it became a recurring theme around the country as well as in London. Existing traditional acknowledgements of the birth of a daughter were unanimously considered to suffer from a lack of status, particularly in comparison with the numerous, elevated

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ritual practices both formal and informal (Shalom Zachor, Brit Milah and Pidyon Ha'Ben) marking the birth of a son.

The view that the absence of religious ceremonial opportunities for newborn girls undervalues their arrival gave rise - in some cases - to the notion that this perceived indifference "sets the tone". Equally, there was much criticism of current practice for naming a daughter; her Hebrew names unceremoniously slipped into a convenient break in the reading of the Torah. A Shalom Nekevah to parallel the traditional Shalom Zachor was a suggestion put forward by London women.

Circumcision

"At my son's circumcision there was no place for me - the baby's mother! I carried and gave birth to that child and I was not in any way included in the Orthodox ceremony. This is disgraceful. All the prayers are said by the father. Had not the Mohel who officiated adapted some of the blessings, I would have had no part in such an important event."

Several women reported a sense of exclusion during the Brit Milah of their sons, describing it as an all-male preserve which offers no role to the mother of the child.

Hygiene concerned many mothers who welcomed the efforts of the Initiation Society in maintaining standards among its registered Mohelim. Autoclaves for the high temperature sterilization of surgical instruments now operate in London, Manchester and Leeds, while Glasgow women value the autoclave made available to them by a local dentist.

Parenting

Women countrywide lamented the fact that the lion's share of active parenting still falls to the mother, irrespective of whether or not she is involved in work outside the home. They reported that in the event of a child's falling ill, the father's schedule is the last to be disrupted. Yet while women supported this view anecdotally, a sharply contrasting view emerged from the Survey data.

In line with more modern attitudes, affiliated women of all ages in the Survey reported a high level of sharing for the various tasks and responsibilities involved in running a household. The idea of shared responsibility for child-rearing, such as looking after sick children, teaching children to swim and taking boys and girls to synagogue, was perceived as shared responsibility, reinforcing the view of parental partnership. Perhaps the women who responded to the Survey may have been describing an ideal whereas the women in the discussion groups were describing their reality.

Ultra-Orthodox women however, were entirely comfortable with their central parenting role. They did not support the view that they suffer from a lack of status but rather see this responsibility as key to the sound development of their young people. (SEE: JEWISH VALUES - FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY?).

Post-Natal Depression and the 'Blues'

The isolation of young mothers, particularly those who have relocated to Britain from other countries upon marriage or who do not have the support of an extended family, was found to be one of the most common causes of post-natal depression. (SEE: WOMEN'S HEALTH). Professionals in this field have noted that poor understanding of parenting and family relationships can further undermine the quality of childcare and deepen the mother's sense of inadequacy. Signs of strain were reported among the ultra-Orthodox mothers of large families, especially where the father is not encouraged to take any responsibility for raising the children.

22% of affiliated respondents expressed some experience of depression in their family.

The Working Mother

The Survey brought attitudes towards working women sharply into focus. It appears to be in order for women to work full-time if there are no children of school age at home and to work part-time when the youngest has started school. There is also some support amongst the synagogue-affiliated for working part-time even when there are children under school age (42% of all synagogue members). As might be expected with higher proportions of divorcees and other singles, unaffiliated women are more willing to accept the idea that mothers with young children can work full-time. The data shows that Progressive women were somewhat more ready to accept the concept of a working mother than the Orthodox but this variation may be more closely related to the slightly younger age profile of the Progressive respondents than to any religious affiliation.

Babies and Toddlers

While the return of Jewish mothers to paid employment outside the home following the birth of a baby reflects current trends in society at large, Jewish childcare brings with it a range of additional complications.

While women agreed that local authority registered childminders were often highly sympathetic to the specific requirements pertaining to a Jewish child in their care, many women felt nevertheless, that their needs would be best served within the community. Many voiced the preference for leaving their children in a Jewish environment where Kosher food need not be a problem and where Hebrew songs and basic cultural awareness of Jewish festivals and customs could be imparted from an early age. Women involved in part-time, lower paid jobs remained anxious that the cost of such a service should not be prohibitive to them.

Working Mothers/Domestic Arrangements

“This is a real dilemma. Financial pressures leave little choice but to work, yet there is such a lack of affordable childcare. What can I do?”

Lack of after-school care and school holiday provision for children was a widespread and serious concern, one that was shared right across the spectrum of opinion. Dependable, quality childcare corresponding to the actual working day constitutes a permanent source of anxiety for working mothers.

Few of those who could afford to employ residential domestic help expressed complete satisfaction with the au-pair as their major means of support. Interestingly, there was unanimity in their vision of an ideal society with an American-style Community Centre at its heart, providing an umbrella for a working mother's needs. There were those who believed that the community already possesses a significant and largely untapped resource - retired women with time to spare - aka the Jewish granny. (SEE: INTER-GENERATIONAL RELATIONS). With the increased fragmentation of the Jewish family, women whose children and grandchildren no longer live nearby, may be willing to enter into a paid arrangement to provide short-term support to a working mother as a surrogate granny and enjoy useful involvement in the life of a young family.

As a result of the difficulties that working mothers expressed with domestic and childcare arrangements, the Survey specifically explored four of the most common problems raised; arranging affordable childcare, getting children to after-school activities, finding a job which fits in with school hours and making school holiday plans which fit in with work.

One in four of those women with a job reported experiencing a problem with these practical matters. It is conceivable that some working mothers deny those problem areas in order to allay the very well-documented guilt of the working mother. In addition, the sample of respondents is predominantly middle class and practical problems may be solved in some cases with the assistance of paid domestic help. The extent to which this is shown to be the case cannot be answered through the data. The apparent ease with which many women appear to be combining employment and motherhood, however,

should not be allowed to obscure the very real appeals for help from the community voiced at the meetings and among one quarter of the Survey respondents.

The Survey provides us with one other insight which appears to match women's anecdotal experiences more closely. 73% of respondents felt themselves mainly responsible for general domestic jobs, while only 23% reported that they were in charge of paying household bills.

Parenting Alone

Since the majority of working mothers in two-parent families were found to experience difficulties in meeting the complex variety of their children's needs, it is hardly surprising that single mothers reported feeling particularly exposed.

They felt especially vulnerable to the instability of childcare arrangements and the possibility of sudden illness. The idea of a local Jewish Grannies Network was a particularly attractive option to this group, for whom the lack of cover for their children in the event of an emergency is a real fear.

A perceived emphasis on the respectable profile of the Jewish family unit consisting of two parents, was reported to be a contributing factor to feelings of failure among single mothers. This leads, in many cases to a sense of disenfranchisement and marginalisation from the community. Financial considerations loom large among many single mothers for whom the cost of being Jewish is an added burden. (SEE: THE COST OF BEING JEWISH - SINGLE WOMEN). It was noted that while many of the Jewish day schools were known to offer subsidised places to children of single parent families, it was reported that several respondents' applications for reduced Hebrew Classes fees have been subject to less than sensitive scrutiny. (SEE: SINGLE MOTHERS).

Women's Experiences of Jewish Education as Children: The Quantity

The Survey and the Review highlighted two different aspects of women's own experiences of Jewish education as children. The former provided an opportunity to gather figures on the extent of women's exposure to Jewish education, while the meetings enabled women to express their feelings on the quality of that education.

The Survey confirmed earlier studies (Worms Report, 1993) that a high proportion of Jewish women (87%) received some form of Jewish education

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during their childhood. Women under 40 were marginally more likely to have received a Jewish education (91%) than older women (85%). There is, however, no variation between affiliated and unaffiliated women, suggesting that the presence or absence of Jewish education is not related in any simple way to adult Jewish lifestyle.

Although these figures of participation in Jewish education appear high, two factors must be borne in mind. Firstly, the data do not provide a fully representative profile of the educational background of Anglo-Jewish women because the learning experiences of those who have completely assimilated is, by definition, excluded. Secondly, it must be noted that although most of the respondents experienced some Jewish education as children, the extent of that exposure in most cases was rather limited. Only one in six attended a Jewish day school and less than one in 20 attended both primary and secondary Jewish school. For the great majority of respondents, Jewish education consisted of Hebrew Classes or nothing at all (72%). This can be compared with a level of secular education among the respondents that is very much higher than the national average. Furthermore the data demonstrated that Jewish education among 85% of the women ceased by age 13. (SEE: BAT MITZVAH).

Women's Experiences of Jewish Education as Children: The Quality

“Chaotic, repetitive, uninspiring, rigid, zilch!”

A chorus of discontent greeted this topic at the open meetings, discussion groups and workshops. With the exception of one adult who had bonded with her Cheder teacher some thirty years ago, the unanimous view of women who have passed through the mainstream Orthodox Hebrew Classes system and/or who have had contact with its classes subsequently through their grown children, is almost universally uncomplimentary.

Both style and content were pilloried, the overriding message being one of deep regret at a lost learning opportunity. Lessons were held to be disorganised, boring and repetitious, offering little or no scope for group discussion or the study of Modern Hebrew. They reported that many Hebrew classes were staffed by teenagers whose only qualification was that they were religious. While women accepted that time constraints imposed limits on what could be achieved during Hebrew Classes, many of the mothers whose own experiences were a disappointment to them were doubly anxious that their own children should thrive during these few contact hours in a Jewish educational environment.

Sexism, in the form of an unofficial practice of paying extra attention to boys during the lead up to their Bar Mitzvah at the expense of the girls, was reported to operate

within some Hebrew Classes currently. This was felt to be damaging to the girls' confidence, who felt devalued and patronised by the experience. (SEE: TEENAGE CENTRES). The lack of quality staff - a constant concern - is put down to the current low scale of wages. There was some anxiety among women in Newcastle over the poor standards, which they believed to be partly attributable to a dearth of suitably trained teachers. It was felt that the contribution of retired schoolteachers with classroom experience would be of value to this community.

In the light of Jewish educators' growing understanding of the special needs of children with learning difficulties, many women believed that it was inevitable that these issues would present themselves within the Hebrew Classes system, too. Birmingham expressed concern at the lack of resources for integrating a child with learning difficulties at Cheder, begging the question: "Must these children do without?" (SEE: CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES).

Women within the Progressive movement expressed unequivocal satisfaction for their own Hebrew Classes. It was felt that the intelligent and engaging teaching materials, mature, trained teachers and parity of provision for boys and girls undoubtedly contributed to the attractiveness of these classes.

Jewish Primary School Education: The Voices

Predictably, some of the regions felt disadvantaged without any provision for Jewish primary education in their town. Bournemouth, a retirement resort conscious of its aging Jewish population, felt strongly that a community primary school could make the town even more appealing to young families relocating in the south of England.

Women in Ilford regretted that the expense of securing Jewish education for their children meant that it was often relegated to the bottom of a long list of urgent family necessities. (SEE: THE COST OF BEING JEWISH - KASHRUT). Many women expressed the view that whilst ideally they would wish their children to attend Jewish primary schools, high costs meant that this was beyond their reach.

A recurring problem that laced many discussions on Jewish education in Manchester was the increasing religious polarisation of Jewish education within that city. It emerged that no section of this community felt entirely satisfied with the options currently available to their children. Mothers of children within the Reform movement reported that their children were excluded from some Jewish schools, while mainstream Orthodox parents whose children attended the city's Orthodox schools felt that their religious credentials were under constant scrutiny. They reported that the breadth of vision that had attracted them to this type of religious school was gradually becoming constricted. Nor could the ultra-Orthodox express unequivocal satisfaction with their educational provisions. Disappointment at the limitations of their own curriculum - which was criticised for offering too few outlets for sport and artistic expression - was a complaint voiced by some parents of children at ultra-Orthodox schools.

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Practical school-related considerations caused concern in certain regions. In Liverpool, despite the existence of a Jewish day school, mothers in this small local Orthodox population were conscious that their children had only limited opportunity to socialise with other children of a similar background. Leeds women believed a register of approved Jewish teachers with an untarnished track record would be invaluable to them when seeking to appoint staff. In proposing the idea of a central register, compiled centrally by the Chief Rabbi's Office, they felt confident that a directory of quality staff would be most beneficial to schools in the regions. Glasgow reported an urgent need for suitably qualified Jewish educators, expressing frustration at the difficulties associated with attracting calibre professionals to a small community so far removed from London. Women in Leicester brought strong support for the view that the centrality of the State of Israel is the underpinning of a meaningful Jewish learning experience.

Teenagers who had received a Jewish primary school education offered powerful endorsements in favour of their experience: "It gave us a great sense of identity and pride in being Jewish. It was living Judaism in a positive atmosphere." Yet women around the country submitted the view that an over-dependence on Jewish schools could be the cause of lazy parenting habits. It was argued that some parents who educate their children in Jewish schools allow themselves the luxury of shirking their responsibilities by "leaving it all up to the teachers". Some felt that slack parenting could arise out of an assumption that a parent's duty to guide the child and instil solid Jewish values had been discharged during school hours. (SEE: JEWISH VALUES - FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY?).

Children's Synagogue Services

Discussion on this topic elicited a range of diverse reactions. Some women believed that while there was a value in offering a separate service for children in a more contained, informal environment, which can foster confidence and highlight key elements of synagogue ritual - blowing the Shofar, opening the Ark - this should not preclude children from participating in the main service. Some believed that appropriate synagogue behaviour and a sense of decorum could only be learned by experiencing the tone of adult services. A blend of both elements was held to be the most desirable option.

Patchiness of provision was reported; in the absence of a unified standard procedure many children's services were felt to be disorganised and poorly run. But Orthodox women's most serious concern was over the extent of girls' involvement; some central Orthodox synagogues invited girls to play an active role, others were more sparing. Clearer guidelines for individual children's service leaders would be welcomed.

Yet even among services which currently offer scope for the active participation of girls, anxiety was expressed that this could be construed as "encouraging false

expectations”, holding out a promise of ongoing involvement in synagogue ritual which - within the mainstream Orthodox synagogue - will inevitably come to a complete stop at Bat Mitzvah. “What point is there in building up the girl to the level of a Bar Mitzvah boy, if the week after her Bat Mitzvah she’s put upstairs in the ladies’ gallery?”

Women debated the notion of separate children’s services for girls. For some, this was construed as sound preparation for graduation to Women’s Prayer Groups, while for others it was seen as a means of ensuring that girls receive a clearer understanding of the meaning of prayer. (SEE: WPGs). Both agreed that knowledge and familiarity was the key to enriching their future observance.

The Unaccompanied Child at Synagogue Services

“Now that I am a single parent I face the problem of what will happen when my son is five, six, seven, and all other boys are downstairs with their fathers. What will happen when he is ten, eleven, twelve? Am I to be one of the few women attending Friday evening and Saturday morning services with my son? Do I take him upstairs with me so that he is separated from the other boys and men? Or does he have to go downstairs on his own, while I sit, probably alone, so far away from my son?”

There was concern over the difficulties facing the son of a single mother, the daughter of a single father or even a child wishing to attend synagogue, but whose parent is unwilling. It was felt that separate seating arrangements in mainstream Orthodox synagogues exacerbate this problem. Single mothers of sons for whom there is no obvious male adult to act as a surrogate, reported great frustration with seating arrangements that left their son “all at sea”. Mothers reported experiencing this enforced separation and its concomitant helplessness most acutely as their sons approached Bar Mitzvah. (SEE: SINGLE MOTHERS).

Many women expressed the view that without an accompanying father, their sons cannot claim an equal stake in the synagogue service; a difficulty that is highlighted on such occasions when fathers and sons traditionally perform synagogue rituals together. This perception has led to a sense of powerlessness and alienation in some mothers. An interesting solution emerged from discussions on this topic in Leicester, where it was suggested that a rota of Shabbat Aunties could be available to accompany children of parents who do not attend synagogue. Women suggested that proxy fathers, by extension, could offer a helping hand to boys.

Sex Education for Jewish Children

Statutory requirements appear to have thrown the issue of sex education into public debate, given the vocal responses on this topic at many of the open meetings. Many

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women felt that Jewish educators can no longer shy away from this topic as it was thought they had done in the past.

Respondents to the Survey were less adamant about their need for help with their children's sex education with only 10% of the affiliated expressing this need, compared to 74% expressing the need for contraception/birth control information. Yet despite these low figures, new legislation compels the Jewish community to address this issue and therefore the feedback from the groups is instructive.

Leeds women spoke for many regions when they expressed the unequivocal view that sex education - in an age where AIDS is a real fear - must no longer be perceived as a "dirty subject" but rather as a serious duty. Women from Liverpool and Birmingham were united in their belief that sex education - taught from a Jewish perspective - should begin early. Some argued a case for including Jewish perspectives on sex in Hebrew Classes alongside the study of relationships, particularly as children approach Bat/Bar Mitzvah. (SEE: TEENAGE CENTRES: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE).

Research committees on health and sex education initiated by the United Synagogue in the '80s attempted to promote useful discussion workshops on this topic to assist schools in addressing this important subject. Yet, it was felt that some Orthodox schools were allowing themselves to side-step the responsibility because of the embarrassment it causes. Women were dismayed to discover that in 1989 funding was allocated for a health education officer with a brief to assist Jewish schools in developing a programme tailored to their particular needs, but this appointment was never actually made. It appears that the halachic complexities involved in knowing what could be taught proved too difficult.

Children with Disabilities

There was much support for the view that Jewish families are particularly susceptible to the artificial notion of perfect children. The arrival of a child presenting even mild physical or mental disability can often be accompanied by feelings of shame and blame. Health professionals specializing in this field reported that it is not uncommon for friction to arise within families where the child does not "fit the mould". Small communities reported that the stigma surrounding mental health problems is often magnified. A strong respite care network and more special schools for children with disabilities were high on the list of women's requirements.

The precise figures on the incidence of disabled children in the community appear low when compared with, say, the incidence of Cancer or depression. Only 4% of respondents had experience of a disabled child in their family compared to 35% whose families had suffered Cancer and 22% who had experienced depression. However, in spite of the seemingly low numbers,

women at the workshops demonstrated a high level of sympathy with families in this situation, arguing persuasively in favour of increased openness. For most women, the extension of evenly spread quality facilities, was a high priority.

Children with Learning Difficulties

It was noted with regret that the community has not yet developed adequate mechanisms for dealing with those children whose progress in education is impeded by learning difficulties. It was reported that some Jewish schools have been unwilling to take up the challenge of providing places for children with special educational needs, leading to an unfortunate but inevitable practice of isolating such children in special units. This runs completely counter to current educational thought and practice. Women in Ilford expressed concern over the difficulties faced by dyslexic children attempting to read Hebrew. (SEE: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF JEWISH EDUCATION AS CHILDREN: THE QUALITY).

Young People with Eating Disorders

Professional reports were received that this phenomenon has begun to affect younger people than was previously the case. Women themselves reported that eating disorders were presenting in children as young as eight. They agreed that food is a significant element in Jewish cultural life and postulated that - in line with wider social trends - a large proportion of Jewish mothers constantly dieting may be contributing to a heightened awareness of slimming in young girls; extreme thinness may be interpreted as the most desirable state.

Leeds women attributed the downward spread of these disorders to younger age groups to the often unrelenting pressure exerted by parents on their children to achieve academic excellence, support an unbroken line of family achievement or as a way of compensating for the attainments which they themselves were never able to reach.

Child Abuse

"It doesn't happen in Jewish homes" was another myth that women exploded in their discussions on this topic. The dawning awareness that sexual, physical and emotional child abuse can and does occur in Jewish families was greeted with a blend of discomfort and relief that the subject was at last out in the open.

The overwhelming response to this issue was that the community must acknowledge the reality of child abuse first before constructive initiatives to address it can begin.

But the way forward was not at all clear. There was much support from women in Ilford for the idea of a helpline as well as a Jewish communal counselling service with experienced child psychologists to support post-traumatic victims and their siblings. Yet a perceived lack of confidentiality was considered a real impediment to its uptake. In these circumstances it was felt that many parents would prefer to use the services of a non-Jewish agency such as Childline, where their anonymity and that of the child involved could be assured.

These attitudes were balanced by the view that Jewish child abuse brings a host of complications all its own: the abuser may appear to be a highly respected, upstanding member of the community. Jewish community counselling may also be best placed to advise victims on the way forward most suited to their particular communal circumstances.

Recent publicized child abuse cases involving Jewish children have exposed the need for an effective mechanism which can address these difficult issues in a sensitive and professional manner. It was agreed that child abuse, whose effects can devastate not just one individual's future but threaten the long-term security of an entire family and undermine the healthy development of the community itself, is clearly not a province for the untrained lay person or inexperienced Rabbi.

Jewish Values - Family Responsibility?

"It's not considered 'trendy' to be Jewish."

"It is essential that from a young age, goals and way of life are spelled out to them. In this way they will avoid the dilemma of mixed messages and the crises experienced by so many. They will not need to ask: Who am I? and Where am I going?"

A range of external social influences - particularly the ready availability of drugs - caused widespread anxiety among women across the country. While it was agreed that resilience to peer pressure is borne of strong value systems, few believed that the responsibility for imparting sound and sustaining values was being effectively discharged by families today.

Both in Scotland and in Leeds, women felt certain that Jewish values were a serious family responsibility which ought not to be delegated to Hebrew Classes. Women in Ilford believed that many of them lacked the tools. They argued that women themselves were insufficiently educated to take on the responsibility of imparting strong value systems and lacked the necessary knowledge to fortify their children adequately in the face of overwhelming adverse social influences. Newcastle argued that parents were becoming increasingly apathetic, thus neglecting to take up the challenge. While Liverpool women believed that no matter how hard families may try to promote Jewish values within the home, many children feel ever more able to disregard the wishes of their parents.

Both Reform and Orthodox women in Manchester reported clashes between parents' and children's value systems when the latter seek more knowledge and learning opportunities than the former. While Manchester's ultra-Orthodox expressed satisfaction that their values were being adequately instilled among the youth of their communities. Single mothers raising children alone, while simultaneously engaged in full time employment, requested the support and encouragement of their communities in raising strong, principled youngsters. (SEE: SINGLE MOTHERS).

The Impact of Jewish Schools

The growth in the number of Jewish school places in recent years is accurately reflected in the Survey data. While only 12% of respondents aged 40-49 had attended Jewish schools, 23% of those under 40 had taken that route. However, the variation in Jewish schooling across synagogue groups is more surprising, particularly the relatively high rate now unaffiliated. The proportion of Jewish day school graduates among the unaffiliated, provides the first suggestion that Jewish schooling may not have the positive impact that is popularly assumed.

The Survey revealed that the majority of Jewish day school pupils were raised in central Orthodox homes, but as adults they are spread throughout the range of synagogal bodies. While natural shifts in religious affiliation occur from one generation to the next, it is clear that Jewish schooling has not prevented a substantial shift away from central Orthodoxy leftwards, but with some movement also towards the right.

Youth in Secular Schools

“Going to a Jewish primary school made me feel protected, now I find that I am more exposed.”

Despite the Survey's findings, adolescents who had transferred from Jewish day schools into the independent/state school system reported feeling substantially advantaged by the Jewish educational grounding of their primary school years.

Women in Leeds spoke for several other regions in their support for Jewish assemblies as part of the non-Jewish secondary school curriculum. They expressed the view that these separate assemblies were an effective vehicle for identification as well as an opportunity to promote a positive self-image among Jewish youth in a non-Jewish environment. Several reported with concern that some secular schools were unable to invigilate examinations for students who had been prepared for Modern Hebrew 'A' level externally.

Mothers whose children were not being educated in Jewish schools were held to be more likely to support their children's Jewish education and actively promote Jewish values at home; Jewish schools - it was argued - do little to encourage parental contribution.

Teenage Centres

Despite countrywide unanimity over the importance of providing adolescents with a strong and appealing Jewish framework within which to evaluate the numerous conflicting influences which they encounter during this formative period, it was reported that many communities still lack any provision of this kind.

It was acknowledged that the United Synagogue's Teenage Centres - which prepare children over the age of eleven for Bat/Bar Mitzvah and beyond - operate successfully in some areas, however this enthusiasm was partly attributable to relief at having left the often hollow experience of Hebrew Classes behind them. "I went all the way through Cheder and I remember nothing," was a representative view. (SEE: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF JEWISH EDUCATION AS CHILDREN: THE QUALITY).

Although it was agreed that Teenage Centres do let in fresh air by encouraging meaningful discussion on a variety of modern issues such as ethics, relationships and the environment, further probing revealed a good deal of equivocation. Orthodox teenagers attending United Synagogue Teenage Centres reported feeling uncomfortable on behalf of their less Orthodox peers who, they claim, tended to be marginalised by some youth leaders. Similarly, teenage girls were vexed to experience the sharp end of an unofficial policy of focusing more closely on the boys than on the girls in the run up to Bat and Bar Mitzvah. When asked to suggest ways of improving Teenage Centres, women were adamant that Modern Hebrew language study was, in their view, the key to a positive sense of identification with Judaism, free from sectarian overtones. "Once you start looking at how religious everyone is, the group breaks down and people stop coming."

Progressive teenagers affiliated to Reform Synagogue Youth's education programme expressed unqualified delight. "It makes you feel fantastic to be Jewish...that's what attracts young people." It was reported that robust attitudes towards Judaism such as this, have lead some Orthodox teenagers to envy their Reform and Progressive counterparts and in some cases to leave and join them.

Almost all regions - with the notable exception of Liverpool which has its own Community Centre - expressed deep anxiety that their youth were at best unsupported by the community and at worst neglected. This was attributed to a variety of different causes: Glasgow reported difficulty in recruiting suitable youth leaders, while women in Newcastle believed that their town suffered from a lack of facilities. Women in

Birmingham acknowledged the additional burden that their lack of provision places on youth groups - as the sole vehicle outside the home - to strengthen the community's youth.

Newcastle drew attention to the need to support young people more energetically in the face of the growing climate of anti-semitism.

Bat Mitzvah and Bat Chayil

All rites of passage debates evinced strong reaction and the Bat Mitzvah/Chayil issue was no exception. Women began by drawing a clear distinction between the two terms. They agreed that Bat Mitzvah - taking responsibility for one's own actions - was an inevitable fact for all girls turning twelve. However, marking that event in a dignified Bat Chayil ceremony was a matter of individual choice and open to a variety of interpretations.

Some sections of the community considered that they had found the ideal solution. Ultra-Orthodox women felt content with a private family party kept firmly outside the synagogue arena. Reform women believed that their girls profited from participation in a full synagogue service on a par with their male counterparts.

However, the dissatisfaction among central Orthodox women was overwhelming. Both style and content of the standard Orthodox Bat Chayil were heavily criticised. Classes were held to be an unchallenging combination of baking and embroidering Challah cloths, while the group ceremony - by its very nature - was an impediment to individual spiritual growth. The practice of processing girls in batches on an arbitrary Sunday afternoon was widely perceived as degrading, contrived and lacking status both by the girls themselves and by women in general.

Mainstream Orthodox mothers educating their daughters in Jewish day schools revealed that low educational standards in Bat Chayil classes have led to many girls opting out of the programme. Liverpool women added with some resignation that as classes were so poor, refresher courses at strategic intervals should be made available as a supplement.

Several strategies were proposed in an attempt to stem such corrosive disenchantment. "One girl - one Shabbat" was a widely supported view both in London and the regions. Some women in London argued that the most appropriate place for a girl to celebrate her Bat Chayil was in a Women's Prayer Group. (SEE: WPGs). Others expressed concern that this was yet another compromise solution as it would exclude fathers.

It was noted that some synagogues are already evolving new mechanisms for accommodating girls who wish to mark their coming of age with a serious public address on the Shabbat closest to their birthday. Since the launch of this Review, central Orthodox synagogues have seen several Bat Mitzvah deliver well-researched

Divrai Torah either in the synagogue itself after the conclusion of the service, or during synagogue hours in a specially designated separate service.

This was not a topic which elicited great anxiety among Sephardi women, who appeared to be content with the Sunday Bat Chayil group service and reluctant to disturb the status quo.

The Survey attempted to test the hypothesis that Bat Chayil ceremonies have a positive impact on the level of identification and religious commitment of the young people who experience it. Asked whether their Bat Chayil had had a positive or negative effect, very few women (3%) considered that it had been negative while the majority (58%) believed that it had been a positive experience. However, the data suggests that the experience of Bat Chayil does not ultimately increase Jewish practice, belief or identity.

Bar Mitzvah

All regions argued in favour of parity of importance for Bat and Bar Mitzvah to redress the huge discrepancies in status that currently divide them. Respondents in Liverpool went further, suggesting that aspects of home management should be included in boys' Bar Mitzvah courses.

Both single mothers and married mothers of sons whose Bar Mitzvahs were held in United Synagogues remarked that the separate seating arrangements gave rise to a sense of detachment and made them feel peripheral to the action.

Women in Manchester were concerned that some communities' over-emphasis on the externals of the Bar Mitzvah celebration, was a symptom of undeveloped spirituality finding expression in another form.

Youth Groups

The Survey tells us that while formal Jewish education dropped off dramatically after the age of 12-23, it was replaced in many cases by informal education. Over 70% of those NOT receiving Jewish education in their teens attended a Jewish youth club or similar group, for an average period of three years. The Association of Jewish Youth estimates that only 10% of today's teenagers attend a Jewish youth club, indicating that they may have lost their appeal.

Yet women at the workshops certainly felt that Youth Groups have value both in broad cultural terms and as educational vehicles. These qualities were perceived as especially valuable in the regions. Women in Ilford and Bournemouth regarded youth as a resource requiring encouragement "to put something back in".

Community Centres: Social Life and Leadership Training

Women in London and Manchester conceded that the majority of local communities fail to provide adequately for their youth. The Reform and Progressive movements were held to be the exception, having the advantage of a Community Centre to provide a focus, fulfil a need and inspire community confidence.

“All we need is a building and a philanthropist” was a message from London that reverberated throughout the smaller communities. Speaking for many other regions, Newcastle reported that its youth were doubly in need of a centre catering to their leisure and leadership needs as they felt so cut off from Jewish social life in other parts of the country. Youth centres, it was agreed, could function not only as a meeting point for a broad spectrum of Jewish youth but also as a forum for discussion groups, workshops, drama, media and local radio. Women believed that a positive, well-run youth centre would be the ideal place to encourage youngsters to take an active part in leadership. Ilford was concerned that girls should be given equal opportunity to assume leadership roles.

It was suggested that under-utilised synagogue halls might be put to good use as youth centres, while communities worked towards designated centres of their own. However it seemed that security problems would ultimately thwart this scheme and that young people would be less inclined to attend an unsophisticated venue that had overtly religious associations.

Role in the Synagogue

The tendency for youth to drop-out of synagogue services in their mid to late teens was noted. Women in Ilford expressed the view that synagogues suffered from a growing image problem: old and expensive. Women in Glasgow suggested that this was the right time to offer youth membership at preferential rates to encourage young members to affiliate in their own right as young adults. (SEE: RE-ENTERING THE COMMUNITY). In the light of the meagre turnout at its individual youth services, Liverpool argued in favour of one communal youth service which could rotate around the various synagogues in the town on a regular basis.

2

Stepping Out

Leaving Home/Taking a Year Off

Many young women were emphatic that their 'year out', in between school and further education, presented them with their first real opportunity to study Hebrew "as a living language" in Israel. Glasgow went further, suggesting that Zionism had become an alternative means of identification for many who found themselves unable to relate to religious Judaism.

Girls in their late teens revealed that this is often the time when a female role model or by the same token, a key cultural or learning experience, was most likely to influence their beliefs and shape their attitudes.

This tendency was supported at an open meeting of Orthodox girls who had experienced a year at Yeshiva or Seminary in Israel. In their descriptions, the girls reported with some excitement that they were being taught by "inspiring and fiery teachers" who at last gave them the tools they needed for independent learning at a serious level. After having been taught *how* to practice Judaism - at Hebrew classes or Jewish Schools - they felt that at last they were being offered the opportunity to ask the question '*why?*'. Conceding that on first arrival in Israel their own standards in Jewish learning compared unfavourably with that of girls from the USA and Canada, they nevertheless reported relishing the new challenges that were laid open to them and perceived their educators as "role models for life".

University

"Our kids leave for good when they go away to university - and often abandon their Jewish values, too."

A common perception of entering university, which reverberated around all the regions, was that Jewish students face the first real challenge to their upbringing and education at this time. The university environment was targeted as one of several scenarios where potential inter-faith relationships begin, some of which ultimately lead to intermarriage. (SEE: INTERMARRIAGE).

While women hoped that the combined efforts of Jewish Societies and University Chaplains would provide the focus for Jewish students to remain positively identified throughout the duration of their degree course, both were perceived as inadequate. Jewish societies were felt to be too Orthodox, plugging a party line which did not embrace shades of Judaism. This inevitably resulted in turning away students of different hues. Although University Chaplains were found to be popular with many students, their numbers are dwindling with some universities no longer served by a Chaplain at all. Mothers expressed the concern that this leaves too many Jewish students exposed to a range of dubious social trends, without any anchor.

The Impact of Jewish Education

Throughout the discussion on Jewish youth, respondents generally assumed that informal, if not formal Jewish education would help stem assimilation and intermarriage. This assumption led the Survey team to examine in greater depth the possible early influences on adult Jewish commitment. It appeared that home background was a far stronger factor in shaping adult beliefs, practices and identity. The additional impact of Jewish education, Bat Chayil and attendance at Jewish youth clubs appears very low indeed. The data suggest that close attention should be paid to social and psychological factors, as well as educational ones.

Post-University Singles and their Social Life

Postgraduates in Manchester highlighted the conflict that exists between traditional Jewish home life and the independence of secular life as a student or in work. Against the backdrop of this tension, many felt that creative solutions must be found "to prevent the youth of the community from drifting away". Some argued in favour of a community centre, a "fashionable" community focus for social activities and meetings in a strong cultural although not overtly religious environment.

If Ilford - which has not only a community centre but no less than three singles groups covering the community - considers that it provides inadequately for its young single population, it comes as no surprise that the other regions were found to be even more exposed.

As might have been predicted, the most northern regions felt the greatest need for an appealing social framework to retain its single young people. Newcastle was conscious that its singles lacked contact with singles from other Jewish centres to provide variety and interest and felt isolated. As if in response to Newcastle's condition, Liverpool suggested reaching out to include singles from the surrounding satellite towns, in its own case - Southport, Chester and the Wirral - and involve them in its social functions.

Leeds was not alone in expressing the view that too often social events are inextricably linked to fundraising; Ilford reported too many groups putting high prices on social gatherings. (SEE: COST OF BEING JEWISH - SINGLE WOMEN).

Women in Birmingham went on to highlight the expectations that parents, communities and young women themselves place on single women in their mid-twenties: "You have to be clever and pretty" was how one young woman summed it up. This was widely echoed by many single respondents who supported the charge that communities are responsible for promoting marriage as not only a desirable state to which the Jewish woman should aspire, but in some cases the *only* state, the supreme attainment.

Single Women

"I am fed up with being regarded as not quite grown up by the Jewish community because I am not married. I am fed up with being asked if I'm 'seeing' anyone - there's a euphemism! I am fed up with the patronising assumption that my lifestyle is somehow inferior to that of a partnered woman."

Such was the confluence of opinion and strength of feeling surrounding single women's issues that references to geographical distinctions and sectarian affiliations - except in some very specific cases - were virtually unnecessary. While it cannot be said that the concerns and priorities of the 25-year old single woman find their exact parallels among the experiences of a single mother a decade or more older, several strong similarities transcend the obvious differences between them.

Single women of all ages, affiliations and sexual orientation, whether spinster, divorcee or widow, claimed to have experienced the backlash of a culture which enshrines marriage, exalts wifeliness and upholds motherhood as the pinnacle of female achievement. Nearly all single women expressed despair as they watched their own identities become subsumed by the overwhelming forces of communal expectation, labelling them sad misfits, failures and social deviants. "It is only with non-Jewish people that I feel accepted for myself."

Single Women 18-30

Young singles between the ages of 18-23 reported feeling at ease with their status and under no particular external pressure to find a life partner and settle down at this stage. Young singles in larger cities believed that more community meeting places would significantly improve their social life, while those in smaller towns felt that there were insufficient numbers of single people of the right age to constitute a real social life. Networking between singles of neighbouring cities - such as Birmingham, Nottingham and Leicester - was seen as a possible way forward for widening the social pool and adding variety.

Significantly, very few of these young women regarded the synagogue as a forum for making new relationships with men. (SEE: RE-ENTERING THE COMMUNITY). When asked to reconsider this statement, young single women believed that their lack of real involvement in synagogue life contributed significantly to their sense of disconnection from it. "Synagogues are for families" was a representative view. They went on to argue that a more active role for single women within the synagogue would encourage them to regard it as a resource for their social and other needs. (SEE: WOMEN'S PRAYER GROUPS). Mainstream Orthodox synagogues were criticised for being most complacent about the needs of single people in this age band; Reform synagogues were widely believed to be more responsive to both the leisure and educational needs of this group. (SEE: TEENAGE CENTRES).

Pressure to marry was reported to intensify substantially among women beyond the age of 25. Single women in their mid-twenties onwards unanimously agreed that their lives were pervaded with an almost tangible sense of being "in a waiting room" - until a suitable marriage partner could be found. With resentment and anger, women described how as they moved through their twenties, their personal interests increasingly became public property, the issue of their future happiness a matter for open speculation and their well-being a focus for the projected aspirations of others.

With passion, single women across the country in this age band argued that the time had come to "legitimise" the single state and abandon outdated notions of the single life as merely a temporary phase or transitory detour on the road to married bliss - the ultimate and only destination. All favoured a climate of opinion in which private choices are respected and the recognition that remaining single - for those who elect that state - can be a serious alternative to marriage, rather than a mark of failure.

These same women revealed the difficulties they faced in acquiring a distinct cultural/religious identity *of their own* that was neither an extension of their fathers' beliefs nor a precursor to their partners'. (SEE: RE-ENTERING THE COMMUNITY). Synagogues were widely criticised for not making sufficient efforts to welcome the single woman with only a few offering incentives to encourage her to become a paid-up member in her own right. Affiliated and unaffiliated alike felt strongly that no obvious community role exists for the young single woman.

This view was supported by single women in London who reported seeking a spiritual/cultural identity through Jewish discussion groups and evening classes. It was here, as opposed to within the synagogue environment, they felt they had discovered that refreshing freedom to express themselves in mixed company as individuals and as equals. Many single women considered that these external venues were free from some of the more demeaning value judgements they encountered in synagogues.

For single women this sense of comfort, ease and acceptability contrasts sharply with the awkwardness of attempting to participate in traditional married women's roles where they felt that their presence was perceived as a pointless departure from the main event - finding a husband. Nevertheless, such is the strength of prevailing social

forces that many women reported being unable to withstand them; some revealed that they were willing to enter into marriages with partners who do not fulfil them personally, purely to gain social acceptance.

Ironically, in the light of both the overt and covert pressures exerted by individuals, families and communal institutions upon single women of all ages across Britain, few felt that there were sufficient constructive provisions or practical support to assist those women genuinely seeking serious introductions. Most of those women who reported an inclination to use the services of a dating agency believed that a large - some suggested free - national and international Jewish matchmaking bureau for Jews of all affiliations would be a valuable communal asset. Some women revealed a keenness to use the services of a professional matchmaker, but it was reported that even in areas like Ilford where an active introduction agency exists, inadequate publicity meant that too few women were aware of its existence.

Women both in London and the regions drew attention to the lack of both venues and opportunities for promoting a fulfilling Jewish social life apart from expensive charity functions. Others felt that the social scene that they were seeking - ideally neither religious nor a disco, but somewhere in between - is a fantasy which does not exist. Some expressed anxiety that while communities continue to neglect the social lives of single people, intermarriage was bound to rise. (SEE: INTERMARRIAGE). "I am 25 years old and I would love to meet a Jewish man. I refuse to go out with Gentile men, although I meet many. It is very hard to find a nice Jewish boy, they all seem to have married out."

Single Women 30 Plus

Single women over the age of 30 reported that for them, all the difficulties experienced by their younger counterparts were magnified and intensified: "The feeling of loneliness, the desire to meet someone who never seems to materialise, the endless merry-go-round of charity functions, committees, blind dates, Friday nights alone, dinner parties at friends' where the talk is all about babies and schools, this is what it is like to be single in the Jewish community of the 1990s."

Single women of all affiliations over the age of 30 reported an overwhelming sense of alienation from what they perceived as the exclusively family-centred structures of Judaism. They felt that they were perceived by others as failures, figures of loneliness or as objects of pity. Many expressed the view that ignorance and embarrassment over alternative lifestyles leads both communal institutions and established couples to shun partnerless women. Excluded, many women searching for explanations within themselves reported that this was the time when they first began to experience a corrosive sense of self-doubt: "I don't go to synagogue any more - I feel like a freak."

As with single women 18-30, here too the synagogue scored poorly, but with one significant difference. Single women over 30 reported feeling no more at ease in Reform or Progressive synagogues than they did within mainstream Orthodoxy; family pews only served to compound their sense of isolation. While small synagogues were found to be more sensitive towards their single members, many women felt that much could be achieved if only larger institutions would welcome single women, celebrate their achievements and make efforts to involve them in synagogue events. It was hoped that Rabbis' sermons could be instrumental in reshaping the attitudes of their communities and contribute towards building a new positive image of single women. (SEE: RABBIS AND RABBIS' WIVES). A few dissenting voices argued that relationships between single women and families attempting to extend hospitality towards them, broke down when genuine offers were perceived as pitying; "a no-win situation".

Most critically, however, is many single women's perception of Judaism as essentially intolerant, overwhelmingly conformist and prone to reject a woman who - for whatever reason - does not replicate the classic model of the Jewish nuclear family. Women felt strongly that for a community to warrant the name, it must embrace differences and acknowledge openly that each individual is valued by the whole.

"It is time for us to realise that single is O.K. Single is to be valued. It is time to erase the stigma suffered by parents whose grown-up children are not married."

The Survey set out to explore to what extent the frequent accusation "the Community has no place for me as a single women" was supported. 45% of non-affiliated respondents and 13% of affiliated respondents supported that statement. The data revealed that women outside London were more likely to feel included by their communities. One third of affiliated singles in London felt that synagogues catered mainly for families, while one fifth of affiliated singles in the regions shared that view.

Single Mothers

"Synagogues are not interested in my problems at any level."

Single mothers believed strongly that the tacit disapproval of their status by Rabbis, compounded by central Orthodox synagogue architecture, pushed them and their families to the community's margins. (SEE: UNACCOMPANIED CHILD DURING SYNAGOGUE SERVICES). Many reported feeling distressed by the seating arrangements which separated them during regular services although this was felt to be particularly acute on a son's Bar Mitzvah. "In Judaic law, the child of a Jewish mother is a full member of the community, but how can he be if his mother is not regarded as a full and equal member of the synagogue?"

Some reported feeling disenfranchised without a male partner to participate actively in the synagogue. Others craved practical, especially financial assistance to support their children's Jewish education without having to "beg and grovel" for special treatment. (SEE: JEWISH PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION). Many single mothers reported finding synagogue membership fees well beyond their means and consequently experienced anxiety over their burial rights, while others called for proper representation on management boards, both to put their concerns on the synagogue agenda and draw attention to their special needs. (SEE: WOMEN AND BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT). Several women argued the case for synagogue welfare officers to concern themselves with the needs of single mothers and ensure that communities were discharging their responsibilities fully.

The Cost of Being Jewish - Single Women

"I am a divorced and therefore not important Jewish woman, who feels that she is more accepted in non-Jewish circles, and who cannot afford Jewish bills - your synagogue and your school - and what help do they give me? What opportunities do they provide for my teenage children to meet other Jewish teenagers? You are going to lose me soon and you are losing my youngsters. Why don't you bring us in, in a positive way instead of freezing us out? Yes, I am embittered. I would like to belong, but I feel I am not wanted - because I am divorced and I don't have much money."

While many single women of all ages reported difficulty in meeting the cost of keeping a Kosher home, engaging in a Jewish social life and subscribing to Jewish organisations which levy a high membership fee, the most acute financial difficulties were found to occur among single mothers. "There is no extra income support if you keep Kosher."

Women expressed the wish that competing Kashrut authorities would put an end to their differences and stabilise Kosher meat prices for good. It was reported that while welfare boards do exist to assist those in greatest need, these funds are seldom dispensed in a way that leaves the applicant's dignity intact. It was widely felt that women seeking help should not be required to plead for assistance.

Bat/Bar Mitzvahs, both the ceremony and the party, were the source of considerable anxiety for single mothers. They reported the sense of failure and guilt that they experienced at not being able to provide their child with a celebration equal to that of their peers. (SEE: BAT MITZVAH, SEE: BAR MITZVAH). Some women believed that this was partly attributable to the over-emphasis on materialism surrounding key religious occasions.

Many women argued that a social life was the first casualty of a single woman's limited budget and thus supported the call for a matchmaking service that was free. (SEE: PARENTING ALONE).

Lesbians

“The Jewish community needs to re-think what it means by family. It is suffering from a collective hallucination. Sex is no longer only to do with reproduction. We have to recognise that sometimes. It is about how well we love, not about how many children we have.”

Lesbian women in some parts of the country, particularly in small communities, felt too vulnerable to speak publicly. Those who did come forward, chiefly in London, were compelled by a wish to stake their claim to Judaism, by registering their own views alongside those of all other Jewish women. For them the question of lesbian status within Judaism superceded all else; the overwhelming message from central Orthodox synagogues and schools being unequivocally: “You don’t belong”.

Yet many lesbian women felt that it was unreasonable of Jewish institutions to expect them to forgo their religious and cultural needs. They argued that they were likely to have fewer domestic ties, putting them in a stronger position to contribute actively to communal life. However, many of the lesbian women reported with sorrow that although they were raised in central Orthodox synagogues they no longer felt that there was a place for them in mainstream Orthodoxy. Most of these women said that they missed it and argued that there were wide-reaching benefits for communities who were able to “celebrate differences”.

Lesbian women believed that the gay community often took caring responsibilities within the family upon themselves by default, as married siblings with families felt at liberty to exempt themselves from these duties. (SEE: CARERS). In common with other carers, lesbians argued in favour of more support from communities.

When asked to consider the role of lesbians within Judaism, young people felt the terror of Jewish gay ‘outing’ compelled many to lead painful double lives or to consider suicide. They agreed that the time had come for the community to question its traditional stereotypes.

Single Again - Divorcees and Widows

“I’ve had endless coffee mornings, but no-one invites me for dinner.”

“Men are invited for Shabbat, but everyone assumes that as women can cook they can cope; loneliness does not seem to count.”

“When I was married, I often asked single people to my table, it rarely happens here. I know it’s awkward to not have a partner and to have to explain to your children that not every marriage succeeds. It’s not the food content that I miss - I think it is the feeling of belonging and to be part of something that I miss.”

Acceptance within their communities was the foremost concern for those women who found themselves single again. (SEE: WIDOWS AND SIXTY PLUS). Both groups found that their new state made socialising problematic with most gatherings attended overwhelmingly by couples.

As was reported among unmarried singles, the oppressive nature of a family-centred religion for those who do not replicate that model held true for divorced women too. While older divorcees with long associations with the community found that their positions were not threatened post-divorce, younger divorcees expressed the view that once they were single again they no longer felt as though they were an integral part of the community. In the experience of divorced women with children who do not have the support of their wider families, Friday nights and festivals were reported to be especially difficult to negotiate. Several divorcees reported that although they received community help during a crisis, this support quickly fell away once their particular problem had been resolved.

In common with divorcees, widows reported that while they do not wish to spend their leisure exclusively in the company of other women, they often feel unwanted among couples: "the odd one out". Women argued in favour of a 'drop-in club' for unattached men and women between the ages of 45-60, offering coffee and conversation in an informal environment. Several women believed that this was an ideal forum for new skills workshops, such as car maintenance, basic electrics, financial budgeting and other skills traditionally underdeveloped in women. (SEE: WIDOWS AND SIXTY PLUS).

3

Spiritual Needs: The Orthodox Perspective

Women's rapidly increasing social, professional and financial empowerment has inevitably thrown a spotlight on women's spirituality and their role in the synagogue. While the majority of older women are content to preserve the status quo - with all its attendant traditional features - the ladies' gallery, Mechitzah, ladies' guilds and catering duties, there is a creeping malaise among the next generation. A perception is growing among younger Orthodox women, of the synagogue as a "men's club", controlling, inhibiting and unfairly restricting the scope of women's involvement.

These women have now found their voice and - propelled by a genuine desire to expand the religious dimension within which they live their lives - are seeking the answers, both for themselves and for their daughters. "Rabbis inform our girls on their Bat Mitzvahs that they are no longer second class citizens, they have equal rights, they can even become doctors and lawyers - how inconsistent! So much opportunity in the secular society - so little in the world of Jewish observance."

Re-entering the Community

Many women lamented the drift of teenagers away from synagogues post Bat/Bar Mitzvah. This was felt to be partly attributable to the dearth of opportunity for youth involvement within mainstream Orthodox synagogues, which offers no obvious role for girls in the period between Bat Mitzvah and marriage. Women reasoned that if marriage is late or not at all, young women may begin to feel superfluous to the community and are unlikely to continue attending.

One mechanism that women considered for holding the attention of newly graduated Bat Mitzvah girls and offering a seamless service that averts the need for a difficult re-entry in adulthood, was the Women's Prayer Group (SEE: CHILDREN'S SYNAGOGUE SERVICES). "What is the point of educating a girl to the level of a Bar Mitzvah boy," London women argued, "if a week after her 12th birthday she is relegated to the ladies' gallery?"

Women in Birmingham spoke for many other parts of the country when they highlighted the fact that since choice of synagogue is exclusively determined by the

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parents on behalf of the whole family, few young people regard their own affiliation as a question of personal choice; a perception which weakens their individual commitment. In response, women suggested that rather than issuing membership to the head/s of the household alone, synagogues should be encouraged to devise a new type of all-embracing family ticket. It was felt that family membership - including children up to 18 or 21 - could encourage each individual to regard themselves as closely linked and personally valuable to the community. Thereafter, young adults would be invited to sign up on their own behalf. Women believed that an unbroken chain of affiliation was one way to retain youth and effect a smoother transition to independent (initially low cost) membership in early adulthood. Good practice was reported at the Yeshurun Synagogue, South Manchester, where a family membership scheme has already been instituted.

Women in Ilford reported the difficulties faced by teenagers and young adults from families where affiliation was tenuous, who were attempting to break into a synagogue community themselves for the first time. This view was shared by both Edinburgh and Manchester women who expressed the widely held, as well as long-standing perception of Orthodox synagogues - from the vantage point of a prospective member on the outside looking in - as "unwelcoming" and "cliquey" respectively. Women in Bristol offered the view that newcomers were too often judged by their clothing and that less well-to-do families could be made to feel inadequate or unwanted.

"Anglo-Jewry has grossly undervalued women's spiritual potential with its emphasis on dress and appearance."

Women in the Synagogue

Reports were received from single, single again and divorced women which painted a picture of the synagogue as an overwhelmingly lonely place (SEE: SINGLE WOMEN). These women felt unwanted, uncared for and in some cases even a threat to the synagogue community. Leeds submitted the suggestion that women could make a difference by accepting some of the duties traditionally associated with male wardens, such as welcoming newcomers, greeting irregular attenders and enquiring after members' welfare. Good practice was noted in the Holy Law Hebrew Congregation, Manchester, where women wardens are now in place.

Synagogue membership lists - which often register married subscribers under their husband's name - were reported to be the cause of profound distress to new widows who suddenly discovered that on their husband's death their names were immediately deleted from the synagogue register. As one respondent put it "If the husband has paid his membership subscription for the year, surely the widow is entitled to enjoy the balance until the year is up and membership should pass into her name? After all the gas and electricity are not automatically disconnected!" Such insensitivity was reported to have been compounded on a number of occasions when widowed women

members of 20 years standing, sometimes more, were invited to attend a new members' tea.

Women in London and throughout the regions expressed sadness that they could not mark a Yahrzeit publicly and that existing structures compelled them sometimes painfully to delegate this loving duty to a male - not necessarily blood - relative. The question was posed: "What are women to do who have no male family member to call upon?" (SEE: EXPERIENCING A BEREAVEMENT).

A powerful indictment of women's relationships with their synagogues, it was reported that continuing affiliation with the mainstream Orthodoxy was often based solely on safeguarding Burial Rights (SEE: BURIAL RIGHTS). Others believed that their communities were increasingly subject to the influences of external right-wing religious forces which pressed for stricter rulings and alterations to long-established synagogue practices. The right to occupy executive positions on boards of management and the issue of women's suffrage emerged as further flash points between women and their synagogues (SEE: WOMEN AND BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT).

A large number of women believed that Shabbat morning in synagogue represented an ideal - yet largely wasted - communal learning opportunity, with most women registering a desire for some sort of learning encounter within the context of their visit. In their consideration of the Rabbi's sermon, there was a widespread perception that central Orthodox Rabbis addressed their thoughts chiefly to the men of the congregation (SEE: RABBIS AND RABBIS' WIVES). One Rabbi's opening gambit - "As we say each morning when we lay our Tefillin" - was construed as giving offence to the women who were present. Reports were received of synagogues where women were encouraged to participate more closely in the synagogue service by offering a short synopsis of the week's Torah reading.

Many reports were received from those who subscribed to the traditional gender divisions of Orthodox practice - women light the candles, men read from the Torah - expressing dismay that in many mainstream Orthodox synagogues, catering continues to be the sum total of women's participation in synagogue life. Women in Ilford proposed the idea of an ancillary committee - composed of both men and women - to replace the outdated and sexist institution of the Ladies' Guild. "Is cutting up the cake the only way women can be involved in communal life?"

Orthodox mothers of young children registered regret at being able to attend synagogue only rarely (SEE: ERUV). While they looked forward to participating in services on occasions when pushing prams is permitted - such as Chagim, women in Ilford and Manchester reported that it was often impossible to concentrate on prayers when jostling with several restless children sharing the same seat.

A number of reports were received from women who revealed that their decision to leave the mainstream Orthodox fold for the Liberal or Progressive community was based on several synagogue-related factors. Unsympathetic Rabbis and their perceived

intolerance towards single mothers (SEE: RABBIS AND RABBIS' WIVES); the lack of family pews; single mothers unable to sit together with their sons (SEE: UNACCOMPANIED CHILD AT SYNAGOGUE SERVICES); especially at their sons Bar Mitzvahs; the lack of equality for their daughters (SEE: BAT MITZVAH AND BAT CHAYIL); attitudes to divorce and conversion and the perception that synagogues appear to cater primarily to the needs of the middle classes. Lesbian women from central Orthodox synagogue families reported a sense of loss at no longer feeling welcome there (SEE: SINGLE WOMEN).

Women's Prayer Groups (WPGs)

"I go to synagogue out of habit, unless my husband is not going or I am too tired. I am never inspired, I always feel excluded. I want to participate."

The concept of the WPG - a separate service run by women for women - elicited a very mixed response at the open meetings. The majority of women in Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds and the central Orthodox women of Bournemouth were unequivocally in favour of maintaining the status quo and preserving the traditional style of the synagogue service, organised and run by men. As Leeds' women explained, most women were not interested in seeking new mechanisms to affirm their religious connections but were quite content to continue traditional practices - such as candle-lighting - and leave the responsibility for public prayer to their menfolk.

In Liverpool, however, age was a significant determining factor, with older women adopting a conservative stance while their younger counterparts were keen to explore the new possibilities that WPGs might offer them. In Manchester many women responded positively with some groups appearing to be in favour of WPGs. Women from the Sephardi community in London rejected the notion entirely, adding that synagogues now and in the future should "always have a ladies' gallery" to perpetuate the established tradition. Sephardi women in the Manchester area reported that group chanting of prayers accounted for their above-average satisfaction with existing synagogue practices.

Birmingham and Ilford women registered a blend of views: opposing WPGs in general, while also conceding that women's prayer needs are frequently underestimated. Women in Leeds added that - without wishing to commit themselves as a whole - they would welcome more guidance on the options that are available to them. These mixed responses reflect the complexity of women's reactions to the whole question of WPGs. Interestingly, even those women who were not personally in favour of change for themselves respected the wishes of those who were, defending the right to WPGs for those women expressing a need.

Among those who found the idea of WPGs appealing, the majority revealed that they would not wish to attend every week. Yet there was a unanimous desire to master the

fundamental techniques of the synagogue service traditionally performed by men: leading the prayers and reading from the Torah. Many women were drawn to the idea of a WPG by its intimacy and the belief that it offered an opportunity for real participation. Women felt that they stood to “get a lot more out of prayer” if they could play a more active role. Further, women were convinced that there were valuable educational benefits to be gained from WPGs: a deeper understanding and familiarity with prayer and religious practice, as well as social spin-offs such as a framework within which the birth of a daughter, special birthdays and other events in women’s lives could be celebrated.

But more fundamentally, women all around the country expressed the view that the issue of organised women’s prayer is just one of many issues which has not been addressed satisfactorily by the Rabbis. Women expressed anxiety over the Chief Rabbi’s ruling that Stanmore United Synagogue WPG was neither allowed to take place within the synagogue building nor permitted the use of a Sefer Torah.

These frustrations appear to lie at the heart of the anger and resentment that has been the subject of recent reports in the Jewish press. The controversy surrounding proposals for WPGs has led some women to remark that there appears to be a “tacit agreement among communal leaders to keep women in the dark” (SEE: KNOWLEDGE: ACQUIRING THE TOOLS). These women refuted the charge of divisiveness which is most commonly levelled at WPGs with the rejoinder: “Women are not fundamentally part of the service, therefore their prayer meetings cannot be considered divisive.” Women in London added that it is no longer realistic to expect the traditional-style synagogue, offering only one Minyan, to satisfy all the community’s needs and suggested “multiplex synagogues” as the practical way forward. Southgate commented on the apparent selective flexibility of tradition, which when invoked by women appeared especially unyielding.

The recent emergence of Women’s Prayer Groups and the accompanying publicity meant that enthusiasts were very vocal at the public meetings. A number of questions in the questionnaire sought to assess reactions to new arrangements for women to engage in prayer and other religious activity. These questions, in fact, elicited very low response rates. Only 46 (4%) of respondents had attended a WPG and they were evenly divided between positive and negative reactions to its atmosphere and inspirational quality. However, there did appear to be some demand for these facilities among those who have not attended. Some 17% of the sample said they would like to attend such a group and a further 22% were unsure, Rosh Chodesh groups appear to be better known - 16% of the respondents had heard of them - but only 25 women, 9%, had actually attended.

Women's Prayer Groups - Simchat Torah

The dissatisfaction expressed with mainstream Orthodox Simchat Torah services was overwhelming. More than at any other time of the year women felt marginalised, literally "spectators at a men-only sport". Each year, it was reported, this more than any other festival, accounts for large numbers of otherwise committed women feeling left out in the cold. Behind the division of the Mechitzah, barred from participating in the main action of the men's service, both women and young girls reported feeling degraded: "like monkeys in a cage".

Among the majority of Orthodox women in London, Ilford, Manchester and Liverpool who refused to support the introduction of WPGs, many were in favour of a separate service on Simchat Torah. They made it clear that while they wished to safeguard their traditional Orthodox practices, on Simchat Torah they longed for a more active role. Women revealed that together with their daughters, teenage and over, they had begun to stay away from the synagogue on Simchat Torah out of a sense of pointlessness and total exclusion from the action. Many women expressed the view that Simchat Torah had become entrenched as an exclusively male preserve, oblivious to women's desire to express their own joy at celebrating the completion of the cycle of Torah reading.

Various strategies for ameliorating these concerns were proposed - including a women-only Kiddush and women's Hakafot - but most notable were women's requests for a Sefer Torah to be made available in a separate Ark for use on special occasions.

The Mechitzah

A restricted view often accompanied by worse acoustics has led many respondents in ladies' galleries throughout the country to feel estranged from the service. A variety of telling phrases emerged from women's accounts of their experience: "apart, not connected, alienated, sectioned off, spectators, marginalised, relegated, disaffected, better off staying in bed!"

Orthodox women in Manchester reported that seating arrangements had a profound effect on their perception of themselves and their position within the hierarchy of Orthodox Judaism. It was noted that numbers of women who experienced this sense of marginalisation, reacted first by non-attendance and ultimately by quitting mainstream Orthodox synagogues altogether, for the Masorti or Reform communities. Young women commented that sitting "on the margins" they could not help but feel literally marginalised.

Conversely, many Orthodox women who attended synagogue regularly expressed the view that they were "elevated" or "on top of the world" from their vantage point in the gallery. Despite their general contentment, however, even these more

conservative, committed women revealed that during certain key rituals in the synagogue calendar - such as the procession with the Lulav and Etrog - they became little more than "observers".

Women's vision of an ideal synagogue layout was one that allowed them to sit on the same level as the men, with a central division - lengthways - separating the sexes. Examples were cited of synagogues where women enjoyed the improved audibility and visibility of occupying the same floor space as the men, but where a curtain Mechitzah could be drawn whenever necessary during the service. A small number of dissenting voices were heard from women occupying the front rows of ladies' galleries who believed that it was easier to see from above than peer through a trellis. Several women revealed that being invited downstairs during wedding and special services had given them a foretaste of what it could be like if they were allowed to draw more closely into the scene of the action, a prospect which they viewed with excitement.

By contrast, women from the Sephardi community in London reported feeling uncomfortable and slightly embarrassed on those occasions when men and women are required to be seated downstairs and elicited strong feeling: "I would loathe it if the ladies' gallery were abolished".

Young women were disturbed by the notion that the separation of the sexes during prayer had been introduced to guard against the possibility of sexual arousal. Others took offence at both the concept of women as a distraction from spirituality and at the suggestion that men were unable to control their urges.

Synagogue Architecture

Women in all regions regarded out-dated synagogue building design a significant impediment to women's participation in synagogue services. Women who felt unable to climb stairs to the ladies' gallery reported that they rapidly became disinclined to attend synagogue altogether under these circumstances and stood to lose the comfort that their weekly community contact had brought them. Many women were indignant at the Orthodox party line which, in their opinion, seeks to discourage disabled women and men who are unable to walk to synagogue from attending at all: "It shows a lack of humanity".

Bournemouth women drew attention to their existing facility for accommodating elderly or disabled women on the ground floor. Women in many other parts of the country called for contingency ground floor seating to be marked out specifically for the use of elderly and disabled women, a ramp for wheelchairs and a loop system for the hard of hearing.

Eruv

Emerging from the many strong discussions surrounding this subject was the sense that the Eruv is essentially an Orthodox women's issue. There was widespread support for the view - not only in North West London, but equally in Leeds and Ilford - that a community with an Eruv would so enhance family life that it would be a significant factor in their choice of address. Women reported a range of strategies which their families had developed to enable mothers of very young children to go out on Shabbat. "But what is the pleasure of walking alone?" Despite several dissenting voices, a firm belief emerged that the Eruv represents a lifeline to young families, single parents, the disabled and the elderly.

Concern was voiced that the withdrawal of Orthodox women into their homes following the birth of a child can often lead to isolation. Women wishing to attend synagogue on Shabbat after childbirth felt particularly cut off when they were prevented from doing so by the absence of an Eruv.

Knowledge - Acquiring the Tools

Women insisted that the most serious barrier to women's religious fulfilment was poor Jewish education - a source of great regret for many (SEE: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF JEWISH EDUCATION AS CHILDREN - THE QUALITY). Senior citizens interviewed at a day care centre in London revealed that unlike their brothers whose parents had saved enough money to enable them to attend paid religion classes, girls growing up in pre-World War II East End were expected to acquire their religious knowledge in the kitchen. For these women, as well as those from the generation immediately succeeding it, the rituals and ritual objects of their childhood represented their only real binding connection with the faith.

However, the view emerged that many contemporary Jewish women - for whom the distinction between rituals learned by osmosis and Halachah was never addressed formally - are experiencing confusion over whether certain rituals constitute customs or binding obligations. Equally, many women reported uncertainty over which religious ritual they are/are not permitted to perform alone, in a group, or in the presence of a man: Kiddush, Ha'Motzei, Havdalah, Zimmun, participation at a circumcision ceremony, Gomel, Kaddish etc (SEE: EXPERIENCING A BEREAVEMENT).

The Survey lent considerable support to the need for clarification on these issues. Two thirds of women in all synagogue groups supported the suggestion that they should be able to say Kaddish at a funeral, Shiva or during the year of mourning. One third of respondents felt that they would like to say special blessings to mark various important events in their lives, such as childbirth.

Two thirds of all women who participated in discussion workshops on religious and synagogue matters wanted clarification of the options available to them preferably in the form of an official, authorised guide to Jewish women's religious practice, tabling answers to such questions as women and Kaddish and womens' role in the marriage service in a readily accessible form.

All regions expressed a wish for more learning opportunities covering a broad range of subjects, from Jewish history, philosophy, ethics, culture and practice to Hebrew language study. When asked to consider their ideal learning environment women demonstrated a clear preference for courses led by "fine women teachers" who could inspire others by their own example and encourage an exchange of ideas in a non-threatening style. Many women complained that Shiurim too often focused on subjects that were of little or no interest to women. There was some support for the concept of study retreats exclusively for women and tailored to their requirements, but more women favoured the group experience of U.S. Family Week as an effective vehicle for learning and savouring the Sabbath atmosphere in the company of their husbands and children.

Women in Newcastle, conscious of the great distance separating them from London's learning centres, proposed Jewish adult education correspondence courses as a possible solution, while respondents in Edinburgh were particularly keen to welcome Seed project fieldworkers. Yet despite an active Seed presence in Ilford and the considerable uptake of the Talmud and Mishna courses currently on offer, their report drew attention to a perceived indefinable upper limit to women's learning which attempts to enclose areas considered out of bounds to enquiring female minds. There was unanimous support for high level learning to be made readily available to these women.

Updates have been received of several new learning initiatives in London and the regions sparked off by the interest that this Review has generated. There have been numerous success stories arising from dynamic encounters with inspiring individuals and with established groups such as the JIA's missions to Israel, Holocaust museums, the Lubavitch movement and Rosh Chodesh groups all of which have to varying degrees given new direction to adult lives. However, women were unanimous that raising children was the single most powerful catalyst spurring their desire for further religious education and self-improvement. "Educate a boy and you get an educated man; educate a woman and you get an educated family."

Family Education

Women in Birmingham expressed the widely shared view that parents are often only made aware of the flaws in their own religious knowledge and practice when their children enter Jewish day schools or Hebrew classes. Many women reported an escalation of pressure within families who wish to assist their children in practical ways and ease their learning experience. Women both in London and throughout the

country expressed a willingness to undertake complementary religious knowledge and language courses organised by or in conjunction with their children's educational institutions.

Women attending an open meeting in Southgate discussed the new Jewish day school which had recently been opened in that area. It was revealed that a significant number of parents who had enrolled their children at the school were found to have no affiliation at all, but nevertheless believed that Jewish education was vital in preserving the identity of their children. To assist parents wishing to support their children's education, the school began a programme of complementary adult religious education and family study.

Several London mothers of teenage children, who had returned to Jewish education in their late 30s and 40s, reported distinct benefits to the harmony and atmosphere of family life as a whole as well as marked differences in the level and tone of their discussions and exchanges.

Rabbis and Rabbis' Wives

Women from the Reform movement in London expressed a widely shared sentiment: "Rabbis who are able to relate and empathise are much valued, appreciated and loved." However, a more widespread view reveals that in the opinion of many women, few Rabbis can claim to have mastered the inter-personal skills that would enhance their popularity among the women of their communities. Women asked themselves whether they were expecting too much from one man.

Divorced women, having felt unfairly treated, revealed their hurt and anger towards central Orthodox Rabbis in particular. They reported a lack of sympathy from their Rabbis during the traumatic aftermath of family breakdown. Women believed that Rabbis were more inclined to condemn the woman and hold her responsible for the collapse of a marriage, even in cases where it was known to have been the husband's decision to leave.

Many of these women felt that their Rabbis were still prone to fantasy notions of a united trouble-free family unit which was at odds with the reality of contemporary life. It was reported that in perpetuating this damaging perception of separated women as 'homebreakers', Rabbis contributed to their downgraded status within the synagogue community. Attention was drawn to the urgent need for Rabbis to develop and refine a wider range of pastoral skills before graduation and through regular in-service training, in order to understand and support members with personal problems more effectively.

Widows reported feeling overlooked once they were no longer part of a couple. They expressed alarm that even in cases of clearly justifiable need such as illness, certain Rabbis were still reluctant to visit the house of a woman living alone (SEE: WIDOWS

AND SIXTY PLUS). Reports were received from women in violent marriages who hoped to find an ally in their Rabbi, who were confronted instead with rebuttals such as "Go home and make him a meal." (SEE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE).

The mother of a daughter who had married out reported how much she had been hurt when her Rabbi referred to her "as though she were dead", while newly-bereaved women added that some Rabbis to the right of central Orthodoxy had refused to conduct a burial service in their presence (SEE: EXPERIENCING A BEREAVEMENT).

To ensure that communities appoint leaders who are in sympathy with their female congregants, women throughout Britain expressed the wish to be consulted in the selection and appointment of new communal Rabbis and ultimately in the choice of Chief Rabbi.

From the workshops, discussion groups and parlour meetings, the strong plea to Rabbis was for them to recognise the worth of individuals and to understand their circumstances and not to expect everyone to conform to an unrealistic ideal. The feeling was expressed that Rabbis and Rabbis' wives were failing in this respect.

The Survey tried to put individual pleas in the broader context of women's overall levels of satisfaction with their Rabbis. Questions that related to congregational Rabbis brought forward rather positive responses. Overall 46% of the 404 women who felt able to comment rated their Rabbi as 'very approachable' and a further 40% said he was 'OK'. Similarly 69% said that their Rabbi spoke readily to ALL of his women congregants and a further 23% said he spoke readily to some of them. When dividing the responses between Progressive and central Orthodox members, there was a tendency for Progressive Rabbis to be somewhat more approachable but the overall figures do not suggest that women have a major problem of communication with their Rabbis, whether they are Progressive or Orthodox.

Being 'receptive to new ideas' was rated as almost the weakest feature of mainstream Orthodox Rabbis. The Survey showed that, at least in the case of U.S. Rabbis, there is greater perceived competence in the performance of practical tasks (officiating, Leyning) than in developmental roles such as 'creating a strong sense of community', 'bringing the less involved into the community' and 'responding to innovation'.

The Survey attempted to assess the extent to which Progressive religious concepts had influenced centrist Jewish opinion, by eliciting views on the issue of women Rabbis. Of those who expressed an opinion, traditional women were almost universally opposed to the idea of women Rabbis (almost 90% objected), while non-Orthodox respondents were equally convinced of their value and legitimacy (more than 90% support). In the non-Orthodox group, arguments were couched in terms of general principles - equal opportunities,

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meritocracy, freedom to fulfil oneself etc - and expressed in strident terms. The Traditional views were equally consensual, the majority appealing to feeling and personal conditioning. The strictly Orthodox respondents, however, had no difficulty in rejecting the notion of women Rabbis on the basis of an integrated value system incorporating religiously prescribed gender roles.

Women across the country believed that many communal needs could be met by the Rabbi's wife, in terms of teaching, counselling, offering comfort and as a liaison between the Rabbi and the women of his community. In some instances, women believed that a Rabbi's wife was uniquely placed to be able to offer some complementary services, specifically for women, as an extension of her husband's duties. Between them and with her consent, it was felt that the Rabbi and Rebbetzin represented a total caring team for their membership. It was suggested that the Rabbi's wife was ideally placed to act as a role model for other women in the congregation. Women from small communities considered that the Rebbetzin's role was especially valuable to them.

All these aspirations were counterbalanced by women's firm conviction that it is unfair to place this considerable burden upon a reluctant Rebbetzin who may also be the mother of several children, or be occupied with her own career. Further, it was agreed that a Rebbetzin should not be regarded as an unpaid helper; in the event that she is willing to engage herself fully in the service of the community, many women believed that she should receive a wage. Further, they shared the view that communities should reveal their expectations of the Rebbetzin's involvement when advertising vacancies or at an early stage during the couple's interview.

Rabbis' Wives - The Response

"I have a realistic view of my responsibilities in his job but isn't it time that the Rebbetzin's input was given its due, at least in a job description, if not yet in practice?"

Rebbetzins who participated in the Review drew a clear distinction between those who saw themselves as a full and active partner in their husband's job and women simply who "happened to marry a Rabbi". Among those women who wished to work with their husbands there was a decisive call for courses and workshops to empower and prepare them for assisting the community more effectively. Most agreed that there was a case for establishing a pay scale in recognition of their efforts.

Glasgow Rebbetzins reported a sense of isolation accompanying their position, a "them and us" attitude which prevented them from being seen as individuals, not just as "cardboard cut-outs with Sheitels". All welcomed strategies that would enable them to break down these barriers. Rebbetzins drew attention to their need to feel welcomed by their new communities having relocated to often completely unfamiliar parts of the country, often far away from their own families.

Women and Boards of Management

Many women reported that the rules governing women's involvement on synagogue Boards of Management were unclear to them. Manchester drew attention to the wide variation in the opportunity for women to take on management roles in that city. At one extreme women are fully represented in executive positions and at the other, they are totally excluded. Yet despite this lack of uniformity, one theme emerged: "No vote - no voice".

Several strategies were proposed to assist women in achieving greater influence in synagogue related decisions. One suggestion being for women to perform an unofficial consultative role, feeding back women's concerns to the main board; another, for women to establish separate Management Councils of their own but without executive powers, or to allow women to sit on Boards of Management with or without a vote. As might have been expected the majority of women who supported the call for the greater enfranchisement of women, favoured this last option.

Women called for the rulings barring women from holding public office to be re-examined. Acknowledging Maimonides' ruling in Hilchot Melachim 1:5 which states that "a woman may not be established as a Monarch, as it is said ('You shall set) over you a king, but not a queen', similarly with regard to all appointments in Israel only a man may be appointed to them" several women cited Deborah, the Biblical Judge and Prophetess, as an unequivocal precedent for women's leadership. One respondent demonstrated that this view was supported textually in the Tanna D-bei Eliyahu Rabbah 9 which states "What was the special quality of Deborah that she judged Israel at that time?...I call upon heaven and earth to bear witness that whether Jew or Gentile, man or woman, manservant or maidservant, the Divine Spirit rests upon him in accordance with the deed he performs."

4

Family Matters

Preparation for Marriage

That this subject was a focus for both the Religious and Synagogue working parties and the Family Issues working parties, reflects the dual perceptions of marriage that currently inform contemporary Jewish life. Marriage was considered in one of two ways: as a significant religious occasion and as a key life event. Reactions to the type and quality of pre-marital education were partly determined by the chosen starting position of the group.

There was lively debate at Religious and Synagogue meetings, where the teaching of the laws of family purity and ritual immersion (Taharat Ha'Mishpacha) underpinned discussion of pre-marital education (SEE: MIKVEH). Women considered the strategies employed by the U.S.'s Marriage Enhancement Programme, which contacts the 450 or so brides who each year register their intention to marry. They expressed concern over the style and handling of this delicate subject.

Women contended that both the timing of such instruction and the sometimes excessively zealous insistence upon every detail associated with preparation for ritual immersion, could in some cases be off-putting to a young bride. "The attitude that, unless a woman can keep the commandment in every particular - she is negating the whole process, is a damaging approach."

It was argued that a bride who had little or no awareness or knowledge of Mikveh practices during her teens could be too easily startled by a first encounter with the subject that presented an 'all or nothing' approach. "If there is no tradition of Mikveh in the family, it is very hard for young women to make that leap." Most women considered it preferable to introduce these issues with sensitivity at a much earlier stage in a girls' Jewish education - as part of a "religious continuum" - beginning during Bat Chayil studies and followed by discussions at Teenage Centres.

Women in the same groups went on to express anxiety over what they perceive as clumsy and derogatory terminology. There was much support for the view that the term 'unclean' is loaded with unhelpful associations. 'Impure' was suggested as a substitute to shift the emphasis away from notions of female hygiene and enhance the

sense of spiritual preparation. Some women went further, implying that if men were also encouraged to use the ritual baths on a regular basis, it would free the practice from the charge of sexism. Edinburgh women felt that it was inappropriate for literature intended for brides-to-be to include "a veiled threat of cervical cancer" if the laws of family purity were not followed.

Pre-marriage education was also discussed at the open meetings convened by the Family Issues working party. Here, the focus was on developing the inter-personal skills necessary for sustaining the commitment of a long term relationship. Birmingham women were among many who called for more discussion time to be spent on love and relationships for engaged couples in the lead up to their marriages, while Ilford women believed that Rabbis and their wives were a valuable resource and should be expected to play their part in preparing young couples for marriage (SEE: RABBIS AND RABBIS' WIVES).

Mikveh

"Unappealing and off-putting" was a recurring refrain greeting the rise of this topic. Horror stories abounded during group discussion rumouring dirty and dilapidated Mikvaot with prying and unsympathetic attendants. Orthodox women described the need to feel that their monthly visit to the Mikveh was conducted in the spirit of privacy in which it was intended, but complained that this was not always possible to achieve as some facilities were situated in exposed positions, where their movements were on full view to others.

In describing their ideal Mikveh, women considered that the priority was principally location - discretely placed yet near to Jewish neighbourhoods, served by good public transport, in a well-lit, safe area - and cleanliness. Bournemouth women suggested that in order to appeal to young women, Mikveh design should aim to create "a beautiful place...like a modern health club". This view was underscored by Liverpool women who reported that this topic generated considerable interest among young teenagers. Meanwhile, some Birmingham women noted with irritation that they were not adequately consulted in the decision to build a new Mikveh in the town until that decision had already been taken - by the men!

A small number of women who suffer from phobias that prevent them from putting their heads under water expressed concern that their needs should be considered sympathetically.

Pre-Nuptial Agreements

All regions favour action that would help to break the legal deadlock resulting from failed marriages where either partner refuses to issue/receive a Get. The introduction

of a pre-nuptial agreement - which would take the form of a clause in the Ketubah marriage contract - stipulating that in the event of marital breakdown both parties will accept the decisions of a named Beth Din, is widely perceived as a constructive step forward and elicited much support. The pre-nuptial agreement would enable the Beth Din to be involved as arbitrator and commit both parties to be bound by the decision of the Beth Din as to whether a Get should be given/received (SEE: GET CLAUSE/ PRE-NUPTIAL AGREEMENTS).

Many women - including a number of Agunot - did not feel that the insertion of such a clause went far enough. These women called for automatic Get on finalisation of civil proceedings.

Women's Role at the Marriage Service

Although instances of women expressing a wish to participate actively in their own wedding ceremony are still relatively rare, reports from a bride in the regions highlighted the considerable difficulty in determining the form a woman's role should take. "We wanted a meaningful yet Orthodox wedding ceremony where we could both take part in some way."

Much confusion was reported over what was halachically acceptable; individual Rabbinic discretion appeared to play the greater part. Official guidelines for future brides would be another valued entry in the proposed women's guide to Jewish practice (SEE: KNOWLEDGE - ACQUIRING THE TOOLS).

Infertility

The view was expressed that as procreation, childrearing and the family occupy so central a position within Jewish society many childless couples soon begin to feel that they "don't fit in".

Manchester suggested that the trauma and 'failure feeling' of childlessness was frequently compounded by a sense of isolation which can be particularly acute for women. While it was universally acknowledged that both women and men experienced fertility problems, childless women were likely to feel far more conscious of the social barrier between themselves and their peers than their partners, who are distanced from "the chatter about babies and children". Synagogues with their "constant references to families and offspring" were seen as unwittingly contributing to the misery of childlessness.

Fertility treatment which distresses many women by the intrusiveness, embarrassment and loss of privacy that it causes, is further complicated by the religious restrictions that prohibit certain methods. It was reported that for this reason, medical investigations into infertility could be especially harrowing for the ultra-Orthodox women.

All groups exploring this topic raised the additional complicating factor of Niddah. It was felt that Orthodox women's infertility problems may sometimes be compounded by early ovulation. If ovulation occurs within the time zone when she is menstrually unfit for intercourse, conception is unlikely if not impossible. Experts in the field contributing to this Review suggested that "an understanding of female physiology, especially irregular menstrual cycles, would be advantageous for Rabbis, as infertility may be the result of intercourse never coinciding with ovulation."

Women in Edinburgh registered the view that Jewish women continue to be unfairly held responsible for childlessness, while others in Ilford believed that infertility has been a taboo subject for too long; efforts must be made to reduce the unhelpful social stigma and develop more compassionate responses.

Adoption and Conversion of Children

Jewish couples seeking to adopt a child in Britain today face all the standard difficulties of their equivalents in wider society and more; the number of babies available for adoption each year, restrictions on parents' age and the current sociological trend towards cultural matching of natural and adopting families has spurred many childless couples into pursuing overseas adoptions. Yet, the overriding fear among these parents is the acceptability of such children within the Jewish community and their official status in the eyes of Jewish law. A fear raised by Bournemouth women and widely echoed elsewhere, is that parents may experience difficulty and embarrassment in later life if they are required to produce evidence to prove that their child is Jewish.

Conversion of the child to Judaism, a course of action favoured by many Jewish parents adopting babies from different ethnic backgrounds, usually follows legal adoption. To the Orthodox Beth Din, conversion of children is regarded as one part of a complete package of parental commitment, sometimes involving prospective families in the not inconsiderable expense of religious instruction with designated teachers. In the experience of some couples this course of study can be costly and there are no financial provisions set aside to assist parents who cannot afford the fees. Cost aside, a few couples considered the Beth Din's researches into the intricacies of their religious observance as intrusive; some believed that if the woman is discovered to wear trousers, this could be regarded as an impediment to the conversion of her child.

Parents still reeling from harrowing experiences of failed infertility treatment and the trauma of adoption agency approval, reported that they wished they had encountered more sympathy and compassion in their exchanges with the Beth Din. Some women went further, insisting that on becoming involved with the Beth Din, the sadness of infertility was compounded by the penalties of protocol.

Others reported that hearing their unconverted child referred to as a 'goy' in their presence was very hurtful. Equally, couples returning home with a newly adopted and converted child experienced distress on being congratulated on their "new acquisition". Women felt that their husbands' feelings were compromised further by officially recording the child's Hebrew name as 'the child of Abraham, our forefather' on all religious documents, leaving the adoptive father totally unacknowledged.

In cases where a child's conversion had been successfully concluded, many parents were left with lingering anxiety that his/her religious status would be opened up for review at Bar/Bat Mitzvah age. It is at this point that they are offered the choice to either affirm or reject the Jewish affiliation imposed at the time of conversion in infancy. Women expressed concern at the handling of this delicate issue and worry at the possible reaction of a learning impaired or immature child.

While it was accepted that the Beth Din is a Court of Law and not an extension of the Social Services, it genuinely grieved parents that few guidelines are available to them and that their family's progress is exclusively a matter for the discretion of the Beth Din. Few couples seek to compromise required standards, but their overwhelming wish would be for a standardised, systematic procedure that is understood and adhered to by all.

Several women revealed that their contacts with the London Beth Din had led them to apply to the Reform movement instead. These parents reported that while commitment is also a key requirement, those who can demonstrate a "track record" in Judaism are accepted without the need for a further course of study. It was noted that as there is no bridge linking the Reform Movement's conversion policy with that of central Orthodoxy, the problematic issue of Jewish status arises (SEE: MAMZERIM).

Several mothers revealed that on conversion, an anomaly arises whereby Leeds couples are allowed to immerse their child in their own town, while couples in Manchester and Glasgow must travel to London to perform this rite. It was reported that in some cases, geographical distance has led to a breakdown in communication between Beth Din and applicant, resulting in confusion, stress and trauma. Women in Leicester expressed the view that provincial couples attempting to adopt, experience geographical discrimination; London parents have the advantage.

Intermarriage

"Stop pretending it doesn't exist" was the leitmotif of discussions on this topic.

Many affiliated women across Britain expressed anxiety at the possibility of being confronted with intermarriage in their own family, but agreed that those who felt shocked by the news had almost certainly left it too late to influence the outcome. Many women posed the question: "We want our children to have all the opportunities

of an open society but we also want them to continue to identify as Jews - how do we achieve this?"

Iford expressed the widespread view that significant numbers of young people no longer regard Jewish religious practice as an important part of their lifestyle: "It's not considered trendy to be Jewish." Many women believed that a sound Jewish education, supported by traditional home environment, were the most effective barriers to out-marriage. However, it is worth noting that statistical data offer only equivocal support for this view (SEE: IMPACT OF JEWISH SCHOOLS). Nevertheless, there was a definite consensus of opinion across the regions that the drift away from the traditions of the past, combined with openness, tolerance and social integration, all contributed significantly to the rising rate of intermarriage, creating a climate in which it seems acceptable.

Some women expressed anxiety that as so few opportunities exist for Jewish youth to meet and develop relationships among themselves, more young people are inclined to seek partners in the wider society (SEE: POST-UNIVERSITY SINGLES AND THEIR SOCIAL LIFE). Others believed that the large numbers of young people from central Orthodox homes taking up university places away from home, made inter-faith relationships and ultimately intermarriage, more likely (SEE: UNIVERSITY). A popular view - which interestingly finds little statistical support - blames poor standards in Jewish education for the rise in intermarriage: "Cheder has a lot to answer for." (SEE: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF JEWISH EDUCATION AS CHILDREN: THE QUALITY). Yet there was some support for the sheer unpredictability of love: "Nothing surprised me more than when my son married out, he had such a strong Jewish identity."

The Survey set out to test whether women thought that intermarriage was an inevitable historical process or not. One third of the unaffiliated and half of the affiliated felt that something could be done to slow the trend, whereas 28% of the affiliated group and 33% of the unaffiliated were fatalistic about the trend. Fatalism however, does not appear to extend to respondents' accounts of their own behaviours. 84% of currently married synagogue members denied that it was purely by chance that they married a Jew.

When considering the reasons for intermarriage, women suggested that a man may be more likely to choose a non-Jewish wife if he has been scarred by an unhappy previous relationship with a Jewish partner. Materialism and hypocrisy within some parts of the Jewish community and the pressure to settle down with "a nice Jewish girl/boy" were cited as further catalysts for out-marriage.

Parental reactions to the news that their child intended to marry outside the Jewish faith varied, depending on the family's commitment to religious practice. "We were shocked. We told our son that we will not accept his marriage to anyone who is not converted according to strict Halachah. We want our grandchildren to be Jewish."

Orthodox parents were in some cases more inclined to reject their own child and the intended partner - albeit less often than was the case 50 years ago - or to accept the inevitable without warmth: "How do you celebrate such a marriage?" was a representative view. Progressive parents' reaction was influenced in some cases by the non-Jewish partner's compatibility with their child or by their willingness to convert to Judaism.

Women expressed the view that they were uncertain of the correct way to respond to their child's intentions to marry out. "Should the non-Jewish partner be ostracised or welcomed?" Orthodox, Reform and Liberal parents feared the disapproval of their Rabbis, expressing anxiety that they would be made to feel as though they had failed in their duty.

Parents whose children are dating a non-Jews would welcome practical guidance from a central information bureau in preference to broaching this sensitive subject with their own Rabbi. A secure, non-judgmental environment was felt to be the most conducive place to air a wide range of parents' fears, among them: "Will I have Jewish grandchildren?, what are the implications for the marriage ceremony?, how will we relate to the in-laws?, do we force our child to make a choice between us and his/her partner?" It was also noted that angry, hostile and aggressive remarks from Jewish parents towards a prospective non-Jewish in-law can damage a relationship permanently, making true reconciliation difficult to achieve.

Women discussed the possibilities available to mixed faith partners seeking a religious wedding service or white wedding. Church was held to be the only recourse available to mixed faith couples where no conversion has taken place. Yet there was much evidence to support the view that the majority of intermarriages still take place in the Register Office often with some parents refusing to attend. Parents of intermarrying children reported that wedding celebrations were the cause of great stress and tension between them and their extended families. Few doubted that their open opposition caused friction between the couple themselves.

Attitudes of the children of mixed faith marriages were also noted. Many women of mixed origin reported a sense of uncertainty about their Jewish identity, several remarking that they had no real sense of belonging and felt like "outsiders" in Jewish company. One woman expressed the view that although halachically Jewish, she was disadvantaged and lacked the confidence to raise her own children in a traditional Jewish way as her own religious knowledge was incomplete. However, the daughter of a Jewish father who regards herself as Jewish was conscious that Orthodox men would refuse to enter into a serious relationship with her unless she converted in her own right. Resentfully, she added "It is as if my parents' marriage is condemned." Interestingly, daughters of non-Jewish mothers who had converted together with their gentile parent in childhood and who were subsequently raised as full Jews, reported none of the disadvantages experienced by those women whose status remained 'half Jewish'.

The view emerged that Jewish husbands in mixed marriages, where the woman has not converted, still feel strongly that their sons must be circumcised. In many cases this wish is thought to be attributable to a profound emotional need for the son to resemble his father, but is nevertheless frequently traumatic for the child's mother. Liberal and Reform Mohelim will usually agree to perform circumcision at the appropriate time but without any ceremony or blessing, but it was noted that Orthodox Mohelim are unwilling to circumcise the child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, in the traditional way.

Women whose partners chose not to convert to Judaism upon marriage invariably supported that decision. "If I insisted that he convert, it would imply that his own religion is not important." Others believed that it would be unreasonable for one partner to impose a religion upon the other unless they felt entirely comfortable with it. Nevertheless, several women made it clear that starting a family - and the need to avoid imparting mixed messages to children - might be a catalyst for conversion. Others believed that it was possible to impart a sense of Judaism to a mixed faith child by "teaching the Hebrew language, continuing Friday night rituals and visiting Israel".

Those women raised in Orthodox synagogues who marry out of the faith yet still wish to practice their religion, reported experiencing difficulty remaining within their own communities. Many find their way to the Progressive movement where they are generally made more welcome, although sometimes ill at ease in an unfamiliar environment.

Women considered whether marital breakdown was more or less likely to occur in intermarriages. Many supported the view that these couples may have invested an above-average amount of time considering how to sustain their marriage despite its inherent difficulties, thus fortifying their relationship. Most women believed that open discussions which confronted the situation 'head-on' were the best way forward for the couple and their families.

Intermarried couples wishing to be buried together frequently face difficulty as very few non-denominational cemeteries exist. Orthodox, Reform and Progressive cemeteries abiding by Orthodox standards will sometimes require proof of status. Liberal synagogues, who have their own cemeteries will often accommodate both partners, but faced with the possibility of being split up, many couples opt for cremation, with or without a Jewish ceremony. Shiva for a non-Jewish partner is unusual, although the Rabbi and congregation are encouraged to be responsive to the mourner. One woman, who could not face the thought of cremation with her husband, hoped that she would have a son to say Kaddish for her.

Conversion for Jewish Marriage

The largest group of people to seek conversion are those already married to a Jewish partner. "I didn't want to store up any problems for my children in later life." Practical considerations such as children's status, eligibility for Jewish schools and the wish to avoid any complications upon marriage in later life were among the most fundamental reasons for converting. However, several other motives were suggested; the greater sense of family, being accepted by the community, fear of rejection or disapproval, or because the Jewish partner still wishes to identify and preserve links with his/her former community. It was acknowledged that a number of applications are received by the Beth Din each year from practising members of other faiths who express an inner compulsion to serve the God of Israel.

On investigating the various conversion options, a number of women reported that their first impressions of the Orthodox Beth Din were negative. Many reported more sensitivity in their exchanges with the Progressive Movement and consequently sought conversion under their auspices, indignant that the Orthodox camp still regarded these conversions as "second best". Some partners whose roots lie in central Orthodoxy reported feeling uncomfortable or "out of their element" following their switch to the Reform, Liberal or Progressive Movements after the conversion of their spouse. Those who chose to remain under the U.S. Beth Din's aegis, with its programme of textual study and practical Judaism, lodging with a Jewish family, encountered a range of different problems.

Women throughout the country converting under the auspices of the United Synagogue Beth Din, were distressed by the lack of communication - through the duration of their conversion course - between themselves and the Dayanim supervising their case. The absence of any attainment targets results in many proselytes feeling "left in the dark" with no-one to approach for a progress report. These women made a strong case in favour of a Beth Din liaison officer or social worker with training in this field to be available for regular consultation during this period.

Many women argued for a more structured approach with built-in benchmarks, so that proselytes did not feel as though they were simply left to drift along indefinitely. The timetabled approach of the Progressive synagogues was held by many women to be both more compassionate and fair. All believed that there was much comfort to be gained from the knowledge that after a long and often lonely learning period, the culmination of their efforts was actually in sight.

A number of women proselytes converting through the United Synagogue Beth Din expressed the view that they were determined to complete their conversion course in order to "prove the Beth Din wrong", a view which supports the notion of Orthodox conversion as - at least partly - a test of endurance. Yet while testifying to the rigours of their conversions, several successful converts said that their study was an enriching

experience which they did not regret: "I went through much mental torture with the Beth Din, but once fully converted the Dayanim made me feel completely accepted."

Experts researching aspects of conversion psychology emphasised the struggle faced by the Christian convert in putting aside memories of his/her past whilst negotiating two distinct cultures and sets of expectations. Calendar landmarks - such as Christmas and Easter - were found to be especially painful. The case was made for greater opportunities for couples to explore the emotional consequences of moving from one culture to another before they marry.

In exploring their own attitudes towards proselytes, many women endorsed the view of one Orthodox Rabbi with experience of outreach programmes: "We have to encourage the spouse to convert, otherwise both of them are lost". It was agreed that the "big stick" approach - which warned of a bleak and lonely future once the commitment to marrying a non-Jew had been made - was of limited use while the couple were entertaining thoughts of intermarriage. Once the decision was taken, however, a sensitive, tolerant and accepting approach which encouraged the non-Jewish partner to consider conversion, was deemed to be more useful.

Yet, several women argued that this relaxed approach - especially when practiced by Rabbis - could send misleading signals to the wider community that intermarriage could or should be condoned. Furthermore, most women feared that few Rabbis possessed the time or the skill to assist families through this difficult time (SEE: RABBIS AND RABBIS' WIVES).

Several women remarked that geographical location unfairly disadvantaged those who lived in smaller communities and revealed that they were instructed to relocate before they could be considered as serious candidates for conversion.

Homemaking

"In theory we have more choices; in practice we are still expected to be mothers and homemakers."

Women in Manchester spoke for the rest of the country when they expressed the view that while there are more opportunities for women to expand their role in the workplace, domestic expectations have hardly changed. Fathers, they argued, may be more willing to accept some part in their children's upbringing but the fundamental duty towards home and family still rests with the mother regardless of whether she is in paid employment. Striving for perfection in both roles was held to be the cause of overwhelming stress and exhaustion particularly for unsupported single mothers (SEE: PARENTING ALONE).

Women lamented the fact that many families rarely sit down to a meal together, a trend that weakens the family unit. Yet the same tide of current fashion that has swept

away the traditional meeting points has left the 1990s Jewish mother with her predecessor's unclaimed baggage - guilt; "If the children marry out, the mother still gets the blame."

In Ilford, women protested that while they lament the passing of the traditional Jewish homemaker, the reason that she does not exist any more is economic; the sheer cost of being Jewish is now so high that women are forced out of the home to take on paid work. "It is time to get rid of the image that all Jews have money."

The Cost of being Jewish - Kashrut

Alongside synagogue membership fees and Jewish education, keeping a Kosher home was widely considered to be the biggest drain on the Jewish family purse. Whereas women in large Jewish centres reported that competition between retailers had brought the cost of Kosher food down to reasonable levels, those in smaller, more isolated communities were experiencing such severe difficulties that some were unable to afford Kosher food altogether. While it was conceded that in some cases opting out of Kashrut was a voluntary undertaking, it was felt nevertheless that the high cost of Kosher food - particularly meat - in outlying areas was becoming a disincentive to maintaining a Kosher home.

Leicester women were adamant: "Kosher meat in our city is very, very expensive". They went on to suggest that if the Chief Rabbi's Office could offer a subsidy to the city's Kosher butcher, some of the community's Jewish families might reconsider keeping Kosher. Women in Bournemouth concurred, adding that, as small communities were made more vulnerable by the existence of only one retail outlet, at liberty to command high prices, synagogues should consider the possibility of establishing Kosher food co-operatives.

Liverpool and Ilford echoed this theme, drawing special attention to the price of Passover foods: "It is difficult enough to keep up with the cost of Kosher food without having to pay for a complete week of food in one go." They added that Ilford pensioners experienced particular difficulty.

Similarly in Scotland, it was reported that the prohibitive cost of Passover meant that some people did not observe the festival at all. Women commented that some strictly Orthodox families bought their meat outside Glasgow, along with others for whom it was more convenient. Nevertheless, many felt strongly that unless the whole community patronised its local Kosher butchers they stood to lose them altogether.

Women in Bournemouth expressed concern that the high cost of kosher catering was prompting some families to engage non-Kosher caterers for their celebrations on grounds of price. Liverpool criticised the price of tickets to charity events. In common with other regions, they feared that young people on a limited income seeking a

Jewish social life might be forced to withdraw and seek companionship and entertainment elsewhere (SEE: SINGLE WOMEN).

Women's Health

As breast cancer has a high incidence among Jewish women, screening was considered important. Historically, cervical cancer has not been a disease that affected Jewish women and is still associated in many people's minds with promiscuity. However, the incidence among Jewish women is rising and most women acknowledged that regular smear tests are of vital importance.

However, during this Review it emerged that many Orthodox women were reluctant to visit their male General Practitioners for these essential health screening tests. Yet many of these women reported that if a discreet service was made available to their community, staffed by female doctors and nurses, they would be encouraged to take advantage of it.

In Liverpool and Manchester the tragedy of Tay Sachs babies was highlighted. Traditionally perceived as a Jewish disease, Tay Sachs is an inherited disorder of the metabolism, affecting the brain and nervous system. In the majority of cases, Tay Sachs occurs in families with no previous history of the condition. As a result of inheritance of a pair of altered genes, one inherited from both parents who are healthy carriers, the child lacks the enzyme, Hexosaminidase A. Although seemingly normal at birth, there is progressive blindness, paralysis and mental retardation. There is no effective treatment and the child will die by the age of three or four. 4% of Ashkenazi Jews are at risk as opposed to 0.4% non-Jews.

For some in the ultra-Orthodox community it is important to know carrier status before marital introductions are made. A scheme known as 'Dor Yeshorim' has been established to act as a central register for potential partners. However, it was concluded that insufficient publicity surrounding available screening programmes means that some couples are failing to take adequate steps to safeguard themselves as well as the unborn child.

While attention was drawn to the existence of AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases among Jews, women agreed that they experienced difficulty in accepting that conditions which carry a considerable stigma actually exist within the community. Experts in the field reported that while gay men tend to shun Jewish organisations, their parents often present for counselling along with infected heterosexual couples and children. Many women considered AIDs awareness vital among young sexually active people in particular those who have not yet established a stable relationship. Jewish men using the services of prostitutes were targeted as being especially vulnerable as well as putting their wives and families at increased risk.

Professionals specialising in eating disorders reported that as Jewish women experience increasing pressure in different aspects of their lives - marriage, career and family - anorexia and bulimia are becoming more commonplace (SEE: YOUNG PEOPLE WITH EATING DISORDERS).

Psychoses were reported to occur in the Jewish community in about the same numbers as in the non-Jewish community. Professionals in the field reported that it was common to see numbers of Jewish mothers with manic depression (SEE: POST-NATAL DEPRESSION AND 'THE BLUES').

Health professionals contributing to this Review believed that it was vital for a regularly updated Directory of Jewish Social Services to be publicised and distributed among G.P.s working in Jewish areas, Rabbis, social workers, health visitors, counsellors and libraries.

In an effort to provide some basic figures on women's health needs, women were asked whether they had ever felt the need for certain types of information. The priorities among affiliated and unaffiliated respondents were similar; contraception, healthy diet, menopause, menstruation and pre-menstrual tension coming high on the list while sex education, HIV/AIDS and sexual orientation ranked lower.

Work and Stress

Observant Jewish women working outside the home were reported to suffer from all the additional complications of Sabbath and festivals. Women in Birmingham addressing this topic who described themselves as "fairly religious" revealed difficulty in negotiating time off for religious reasons. They reported that extra days off were deducted from holiday entitlement or taken without pay. Either way, this caused significant resentment among other staff who were required to cover for the Jewish employee in her absence.

Women felt strongly that refusal to work on Friday evenings or on Shabbat placed the most able candidates at a disadvantage in job interviews, leading some applicants to conceal this "impediment" until the issue became directly relevant or the position secured. A solicitor was made to feel that by leaving early on Friday she was "not committed to the firm" and was conscious of unspoken resentment from her colleagues at her preferential treatment. Some women remarked that as not all Jewish employees exercised this requirement, different standards of observance compounded employers' confusion and made those who asked for extra time off appear awkward.

Some women actually labelled this as anti-semitism, others put it down to ignorance, yet the feeling emerged that in our supposedly enlightened multi-racial society it is still difficult for an observant Jewish woman to express her religion openly without

fear of criticism or discrimination in the workplace. "Jewish women have to be twice as busy before a festival in organising all the preparations and twice as busy after a festival catching up on all the work they have missed!" Most believed that part-time employment, freelance work or establishing their own businesses represented the easiest way for a Jewish woman to work.

Among the stresses faced by a working mother, Leeds women targeted the added burden of guilt which many experience as they spend less time with their families, particularly their children. "Compromising and juggling" was how they saw it. Cataloguing the daily struggles faced by working mothers, Manchester women drew attention to the "acute and intense" anxiety over their children's well-being: helping them with homework, sharing cultural experiences, offering moral guidance and friendship. These stresses which loom large in the lives of all working mothers were believed to be further exacerbated if there is a need to care for a disabled or elderly parent.

Domestic Violence

"When I first met my husband, he could charm the birds off the trees. There was no reason at all for me to suspect that there was a violent side to him. But during our marriage he started to hit me and the children. He always had some excuse for it. Then my husband threw a Stanley knife at me which hit me in the back. I just carried on with the housework and it was only when I put my hand there a few minutes later that I realised that I was pouring blood. I had to go to hospital to get the wound stitched and when they asked me what had happened, I said I'd caught my back on a nail. I had to wait until I was strong enough to take on not only my husband but the whole community; if you come out about something like that, your children will never make a good marriage."

"The myth of the happy Jewish home can sometimes conceal the violence within it".

In the course of information gathering for this Review several letters were received from Jewish women victims of domestic violence. These accounts confirmed experts' research findings: all referred to the shame and guilt they experienced in confiding their stories, several revealed the cruelty of the verbal and emotional abuse which they suffered and the loss of confidence and degradation associated with it: "That dreadful emotional abuse that can completely sap your self-esteem and confidence until you feel like a limp piece of rag."

Although the exact numbers of women suffering violence in the home are difficult to determine, researchers postulate that Jewish women's experience parallels that in society at large. However, such is the emphasis on 'Shalom Bayit' - harmony in the home - that Jewish women emerge as particularly vulnerable to the notion that as victims of domestic violence they are "letting the side down". Of those women who wrote about their experiences, few could report the support of a true ally when the

need to protect themselves and their children was greatest. Several had been disappointed with the response of their communal Rabbi; where they had hoped for practical assistance they found a variation of “go home and make peace.” (SEE: RABBIS AND RABBIS’ WIVES). All of these women agreed that if a confidential helpline or refuge had been available to them they would have used it.

Following the initiative of a group of Leeds women, who established a confidential telephone helpline in 1986, calls were received from Orthodox and unaffiliated alike; from women living in large communities as well as those who are more isolated, from young women and newly marrieds to older women and widows who may have buried their husbands but not the memories.

All women believed that publicity was the key: “This has all been hushed up far too long.”

5

Divorce: Women's Experiences

Women around Britain voiced their frustrations over the problems associated with Jewish divorce and the potential trap which exists within Halachah for chaining a wife to her husband against her will, indefinitely.

At the heart of women's anger lies a profound sense of injustice on behalf of those hundreds of women who remain interminably suspended between a failed marriage and the chance to start afresh, their liberty determined by an estranged husband's whim. Overwhelmingly, women around the country feel a collective sense of unfairness that the future happiness of these women continues to be bound up in Get rulings which are perceived at best as toothless, and at worst a blackmailer's charter.

Pre-Marriage Guidance

While large numbers of women attending workshops testified to the overwhelming pressures within contemporary Jewish society promoting and encouraging the married state, (SEE: SINGLE WOMEN), most believed that the infrastructure for managing marriage breakdown was inadequate. Women in Glasgow believed that whereas divorce once "brought shame on the family", couples today would rather end the relationship than live out failed marriages, unhappily. Ilford women went further, arguing that young people today do not seem to work quite as hard at marriage as their parents did; whereas once women put up with unpleasant situations, now social acceptability makes separation easier.

Against this background of greater social acceptability surrounding divorce, Liverpool women highlighted the fact that very few engaged couples are required to consider the implications of marital breakdown at the outset (SEE: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE). They argued in favour of adult discussions, possibly with the minister who intends to officiate at the marriage, which could examine the difficulties inherent in sustaining a long-term relationship, outline some of the potential problems that they may encounter as man and wife and - with the support of the Get Advisory Service - establish clearly the requirement for a Get in the event of divorce. This was widely felt to be the key to raising awareness of Get issues, so that in the event of civil

divorce, it is not overlooked. It was conceded that Rabbis would require extra pastoral training to develop productive methods of communicating (SEE: RABBIS AND RABBIS' WIVES).

Get Advice

There was widespread support for the swift broadening of the network of Get Advisory Services to assist women who are in the process of obtaining a divorce and more especially to support those women with recalcitrant husbands: "My husband refused to give me a Get, stating that he did not want a divorce. Now he has remarried Reform and says that he does not require one."

Liverpool women believed that an independent Get Advisory Bureau was preferable to a service that was linked to the Beth Din. However, their suggestion was tempered by the responses to a local questionnaire circulated in Liverpool which revealed that the majority of women were deeply sceptical about the chances of Get Advisory officers succeeding where family, friends, solicitors and Rabbis had failed.

Many women hoped that this bureau could organise a rota of volunteers who would be willing to accompany a woman to the Beth Din on the day of her Get. This was especially relevant in the light of reports from a woman in Glasgow who was required to travel to Manchester to attend their Beth Din and obtain her Get. She described her experience as "lonely and demeaning"; she had not liked to ask and had not been told whether anyone could accompany her during the proceedings. There was no English explanation of the ceremony and she did not understand the meaning of the procedures. However, several others remarked that Batei Din had provided them with documents in English. A woman in Leeds revealed that standing alone among men awaiting her Get, she felt as though she was "on trial".

The Get Clause/Pre-Nuptial Agreements

"I am getting married next year in a mainstream Orthodox synagogue and we would very much like our wedding to be as egalitarian as possible. We wonder whether any other couples have asked to sign Tena'im (pre-nuptial conditions) and whether there are any texts available."

The suggestion was received from women in Glasgow, which has subsequently been introduced by the Chief Rabbi but which is not yet in popular use, that all Ketubot should contain a clause which allows for a Get to be initiated, if required, at a later date. "It was done in the 10th century, in times of war and persecution," they argued, "why not now?"

Yet despite the obvious practical appeal of such a strategy, there were a number of women who declared emphatically that if they had been asked to consider the

eventuality of divorce "under the chuppah" or close to the time of their marriage - a possibility which is already implicit in the Ketubah text - this suggestion would have been quite repugnant. However, they fully believed that the next generation would not react with equal shock, given current high divorce rates and an atmosphere of openness surrounding the subject of relationships; it was felt that younger women might be grateful for the added protection (SEE: PRE-NUPTIAL AGREEMENTS).

Get

The London Beth Din alone is now dealing with 230 Get applications each year. The Get document must be handwritten by a trained scribe on the husband's instructions and witnessed by two men who are deemed competent to act as witnesses in Jewish law. The fee for members of the United Synagogue is £260 and £420 for non-members.

A woman in Leeds who had been divorced for 10 years but who was still awaiting her Get, reported that her husband had finally agreed to grant her a Get. However, he stipulated that he would only be willing to do so if she paid for it and she could not afford the fee. Another woman revealed her sadness when the Ketubah drawn up at the beginning of her married life was torn to pieces. "It seemed like 12 years of my life were wasted."

Failure to Obtain a Get

"I would have thought that the mere fact that my 'husband' and I have a civil divorce on the grounds of his adultery - he is now married to a non-Jewish woman after having lived with another non-Jewish woman for 12 years, who has now given birth to a daughter - should be grounds enough for a Get, but because he will not sign on the dotted line, I am unable to remarry in an Orthodox Shul. I know full well that the Reform would give me a Get and remarry me if I wished, but it goes against my upbringing. I once told the Dayan that women are second-class citizens in the eyes of Orthodox Judaism and that the laws are antiquated and archaic. He replied that I was not the first to say this, nor would I be the last."

When a woman remarries without first having obtained a Get, either in a civil ceremony or an unacceptable religious ceremony, she is deemed to be living in adultery. Any children issuing from these forbidden unions suffer the indelible stain of mamzerut for perpetuity. When a man who fails to grant a Get to his wife remarries, the children of that union are not mamzerim, and provided their mother is Jewish they are children against whom no religious disability applies.

Women feared that more and more trapped wives would ignore the prohibition because of the difficulties that are involved in obtaining a Get and contract second marriages

with all the inherent disadvantages to them and their children. It was reported that as increasing numbers of women become aware of these issues they are beginning to leave mainstream Orthodoxy for the Reform and Progressive movements.

Agunah

Much anguish and suffering was reported by women trapped in 'limping' marriages, where there has been a civil divorce but without a corresponding religious divorce.

"Mrs. B. has been an Agunah for over 30 years. She married very young and had a son. Her husband was a gambler who emigrated to Australia and then sent for her. Soon after her arrival - having made her pregnant - he disappeared without trace. No one witnessed his death yet he was never found. She returned to England with the two children. Eventually, she met an Orthodox man who wanted to marry her. She was able to obtain a civil divorce on the grounds of her husband's desertion, but was unable to obtain a Get as there is no presumption of death in Jewish law.

"Her husband-to-be spent large sums of money trying to trace her first husband, in vain. Ten years later, they decided to marry and reluctantly went to the Reform Synagogue, where they were informed that they could not issue a halachic Get. They married nevertheless. The second husband was an Orthodox man who wanted children but did not want to bring Mamzerim into the world. She was still trapped: an Agunah who could not give her second husband children of his own. Her husband died recently - she did not know whether she could mourn for him as a wife or inscribe herself as 'wife' on his gravestone."

Communal Sanctions

Women argued that a man who refuses unreasonably to give his wife a Get, causing hardship both to her and her children, should forfeit his right to be considered a respectable citizen in Jewish society. There was strong support for the view that communities should ostracise him, withdraw his rights and privileges in the synagogue and refuse to offer him an Aliyah to the Torah - regardless of any claim - until he grants his wife a Get. It was suggested that few men who are prominent within the community could withstand the total public contempt of their peers.

The Review received an official public notice issued by the Rabbi of an Orthodox congregation in Canada, stating: "Any spouse who, following dissolution of marriage via civil decree, refuses to co-operate in the process of assuring that a Get is finalised according to Jewish Law in a Beth Din recognised by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, shall not be eligible to be a member of this congregation."

Coercion

Although there are instances in which a wife may compel her husband to give her a Get, women argued that enforcing these rights can be complicated for women in the Diaspora. Whereas Rabbinical courts in Israel may imprison a recalcitrant husband or threaten to do so, the powers of Rabbinical courts outside Israel are more limited. In Britain, a husband may only be compelled to give a Get through moral or social persuasion, provided this power does not amount to unacceptable coercion. This is complicated still further by the fact that coercion in civil and halachic law do not coincide and also by Rabbinic authorities who differ in their understanding and interpretation of what constitutes coercion.

It was reported that pressures have been exerted upon recalcitrant husbands in this country in a number of different guises; physical, financial, extortion, blackmail, manipulations in respect of custody and access to children, matrimonial property, etc. It would appear that if done covertly, these pressures would not be construed as unacceptable coercion and there would be no objection to them.

Many women took issue with the opportunity that exists within Jewish divorce law for the recalcitrant husband to "exact his price" by changing the terms of the civil divorce agreement, either in money, custody or access, before he will grant a Get. One woman revealed that at the beginning of her Get proceedings, her husband had demanded £3,000. During subsequent discussions, he raised his price to £30,000. Another husband demanded legal custody of his daughter before he would grant a Get to his wife. Women unanimously found these 'deals' unacceptable and called for the loophole which allows husbands to extort their price to be removed. Numerous women called for the open application of standard procedures in pursuing all Gittin.

Mamzerim

A Mamzer is the issue of a prohibited - adulterous or incestuous - relationship, or the child a woman has by another (married) partner without having terminated her first marriage by a Jewish divorce. Jews are strictly forbidden to marry the sons or daughters of such a union. A Mamzer may only marry another Mamzer or a convert. A Mamzer has a status inferior to that of a non-Jew who converts to Judaism.

"I knowingly went into the marriage - but I did not enter the marriage 'knowingly'. Obviously, as there are no markings or features on the body of a Mamzer, I had no way of knowing initially. However, I did knowingly enter motherhood. My own feelings on the matter are mixed. I feel, obviously, very guilty about my sin. What I feel impossible to comprehend is how my children will suffer through no fault of their own, both in this world and in the next. It is so sad to think that God would rather his people marry non-Jews in these circumstances than fellow Jews. A non-Jewish woman married to a Jewish man will give birth to non-Jewish children. But,

with a long process of conversion, those children can be accepted as 100% Jewish: the fact is there is a path for them to take. My children don't have any path. In our religion, a murderer who truly repents in his heart can find forgiveness and mercy - I can do nothing. My children and I are worse than murderers in the eyes of God."

Chalitzah

A woman whose husband dies without children becomes subject under Jewish law to the rules of a levirate marriage, which state that it is the responsibility of her late husband's brother to marry her. To prevent the family line becoming extinct, her husband's name perishing and his property going to others, a surviving brother is required to marry the widow.

Nowadays, the widow is considered an Agunah - unable to marry anyone else until the brother-in-law submits to Chalitzah. Thus, she is made entirely dependent on his whims, character and will. If he is unscrupulous, malicious or greedy, he may stipulate unreasonable demands and conditions before he agrees to 'free' her. Any children born to an Agunah who has been refused Chalitzah will be Mamzerim.

"My grandparents were prominent members of an Orthodox synagogue, my mother, the second of their children. In about 1927/8 she married a man who died in 1930, leaving her a childless widow. At that time, there were two or three unmarried sons in the family. My mother did not ask them for Chalitzah. In 1940, my mother met my father, a childless widower. They decided to marry. As my mother either would not ask her brothers-in-law for Chalitzah, or could not obtain it from them without giving them a substantial amount of money, they married in a Reform synagogue. My parents truly believed that once they were married, everything would be correct.

"I am their only child. In 1962, when I wanted to marry, they asked my future husband's family if they wanted an Orthodox ceremony. As it happened, they were happy for us to marry in a Reform synagogue. This we did and also joined the same synagogue. In 1970, with two small children, we decided that it would be better for the children to be brought up in the Orthodox tradition. I was informed that I could not leave Reform Judaism as I was a Mamzer. This was the first time I had heard about my position. I am sure my parents did not know what they had done by 'dispensing' with Chalitzah.

"I approached a Rabbi who decided to fight for my admission to Orthodoxy. As my father had died, my mother was no longer living in sin in the eyes of the Rabbanim. Therefore, he pleaded my case that if the sins of the parents are visited on to the children, then the children may make atonement. He was successful and I was accepted as a member of the Orthodox community. On his advice, my husband and I were remarried and our marriage fully authorised. We received letters stating that our children's marriages would also be authorised."

Women reported that as with this case, so too others like it, were being considered by Dayanim on an 'ad hoc' basis. While their discretion and compassion in this instance have been noted, many women would rather see an end to such "back door" methods.

(SEE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: GET AND AGUNAH WORKING PARTY REPORT TO THE CHIEF RABBI).

6

A Caring Community

Dispersed Families and Aliyah

As more young adults and newly married couples leave Britain to set up permanent homes in Israel, increasing numbers of women face the prospect of being cut off from their grandchildren both geographically and linguistically. Many women revealed the sadness they felt at being unable to communicate with the children.

Women were undecided on the relative merits of following their children and relocating to Israel; the benefits of being reunited with their families were counterbalanced by a reluctance to impose on the younger generation. Yet many women revealed anxiety at the thought of ageing alone. "Without the children, am I the community's responsibility?"

Inter-Generational Relations

The weakening of traditional family life, erosion of respect and paring away of Jewish values saddened many. Women in Birmingham felt that while social and family exchanges occur in a spirit of greater openness, grandparents were less esteemed by the younger generation now than they were in the past.

Most women favoured greater interaction between grandchildren and grandparents and suggested practical roles that could be both useful and fulfilling for both parties.

Women in Liverpool considered that grandparents had a meaningful contribution to make in imparting and strengthening values among the younger family members (SEE: JEWISH VALUES - FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY?) while Leeds women saw a practical function for active grandparents to ease their working children's burden, or to play a part in the life of a family with a working mother - not necessarily their own (SEE: WORKING MOTHERS/DOMESTIC ARRANGEMENTS).

Volunteering

“If we don’t help ourselves - who will? If you can’t give money - give time” were cited as the dual motivating factors for volunteering both inside and outside the Jewish community.

Young women reported social and practical spin-offs arising from volunteering; the company of others transforms the work into a social activity, while at the same time providing work experience in a future career-related field.

Mature volunteers painted a different picture. Many expressed the view that while they were convinced that volunteering was a valuable activity, it suffered from a lack of status when compared to work in the paid sector. They were concerned about the dwindling numbers of volunteers as more women withdraw to take up paid employment and few young women step forward to replace them. Many felt that volunteers would benefit by joining a volunteers’ association that could unite and support these workers as well as improve their public image. Some went further still, arguing the case for a career structure for volunteers to encourage girls and young women to become paid professionals.

When asked to suggest practical ways of improving the volunteer’s lot in the short term, women suggested that more training would help to maximise their usefulness and productivity.

Carers

“What about the men helping us shoulder the burden of caring for our sick and elderly?”

There was overwhelming agreement for the view that no matter how many demands there were on a woman’s time or how full her life, she would still be expected to take on the role of carer for an elderly relative whenever that need arose. In Manchester, women argued that there is greater pressure on Jewish women to nurture and care for their families than in the wider community. A sense of duty often compounded by a heavy burden of guilt leads many women to restrict their own personal fulfilment with a range of unsatisfying compromises, leading them into low paid or part time jobs without prospects, frequently well below their true abilities, in order to satisfy the needs of their families.

Women reported that the sacrifices that they face as carers are both financial and emotional. Those who give up work in order to become carers in the short or long term receive government benefits for the duration of their role. Once the caring ends funding is withdrawn often leaving the carer with little chance of returning to paid employment. Further, women expressed the view that at some point in their caring experience it felt as if they were losing control of their own lives; all their attention

and physical and emotional energy was devoted to the person in their care leaving very little for themselves.

Tension and anxiety were commonly expressed by carers when considering whether or not to bring an elderly/sick relative into their own home. Most carers were racked with uncertainty over the effect that this step might have on their own children's lives; their liberty to invite friends home, play music or ball games as well as the trauma of witnessing sickness at close range. The picture that emerged from Manchester and which was widely mirrored elsewhere was that the majority of carers were desperate for some form of help or an outlet for their own thoughts and emotions. However, some wondered how many women would be willing to admit they needed help.

Bournemouth, in common with many other parts of the country, believed that support structures for carers were inadequate.

They held that respite care was vital to a successful caring arrangement and that a network of short-term voluntary sitters should be established to allow carers the freedom to slip out for some leisure time or to attend synagogue from time to time. Birmingham women felt that carers' needs were still more basic - "someone to talk to".

In Leeds, caring was perceived by some as a role from which women would never truly escape: the emphasis merely shifts from being a mother to one's children to becoming a mother to one's parents. They conceded that caring is a problem among young women who have greater expectations of shaping, controlling and fulfilling their own lives. Younger women carers were reported to experience isolation and embarrassment among peers who do not share their concerns. Lesbians argued that they were often perceived by their siblings as the obvious choice to care for elderly parents. Usually unencumbered by the demands of a family, lesbians felt that this allowed other family members to offload joint responsibilities in an unfair manner (SEE: LESBIANS).

Leeds women considered the difficulties faced by mothers caring for handicapped children who are "supposed to be perfection personified" (SEE: CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES). Feelings of personal failure coupled with limited resources available outside London, for assisting in the care of these children within the Jewish community, were believed to be the cause of pressure and anxiety. Here too, it was acknowledged that regular breaks are essential to the well-being of mother and child. Manchester mothers of handicapped children revealed that they regarded the commitment to their child as theirs for life. Consequently many make no attempt to develop any interests of their own or to satisfy their own individual needs.

For Orthodox carers and their charges, the Eruv which would enable them to use wheelchairs outdoors on Sabbath was seen as a significant benefit, greatly improving the quality of their lives (SEE: ERUV).

In planning for the future of the elderly among the Jewish community, the most instructive question in the Survey was the degree to which synagogue members felt that they may be called upon to provide caring in the future. This was measured by respondents' sense of responsibility to their parents. 30% of affiliated women reported that either alone (6%) or as part of a joint effort with others (24%), they were responsible in some way for the care or welfare of parents. The majority of the remaining 70%, expected to become responsible as their parents became older. It is worth noting that one third of the respondents lived in a different town from their parents and one tenth in another country.

Day Care/Residential Care

Many women believed that it was now becoming more acceptable to place elderly relatives in residential homes on the grounds that the very frail are more secure in an environment where professional help was permanently to hand. It was agreed that often these rationalisations are accompanied by powerful feelings of guilt.

A group of Liverpool women aged 60 plus argued that they had been a "dutiful generation" far more so than their successors whom they viewed as materialistic and less inclined to discharge their duty towards an elderly or ill parent. Yet, many women revealed that they were physically or financially unable to care for their relatives themselves. Some had attempted to do so but were unable to live with the inevitable strain. For those with means, residential care became an option. However, several reports were received from families who were reluctant to place relatives in non-Jewish homes, or whose relatives would only agree to live in a Jewish environment.

For these families, day care became the next best option, but often this was only partially successful. Manchester revealed that once the day care programme was over, the elderly person faced long evenings alone with very few opportunities for socialising or entertainment. Elderly women in Liverpool revealed that fear of violence prevented them from attempting to go out alone.

The safety and constant companionship provided in residential care was seen by many as a definite advantage, both by the children of elderly residents and by the residents themselves who were reported to take great pleasure in celebrating key events - such as Seder night - communally.

The social satisfaction of women aged 70-80, living in a large Jewish sheltered housing complex close to London was tangible. "Before coming here we were more lonely and withdrawn, here we have got our confidence back and restored our self-esteem. Unfortunately, we are mostly widows here - but we find that we can express our feelings openly. We have made more friends and our outlook has changed."

The primary concerns of this group appeared to centre on financial and legal advice - particularly regarding correct procedures for making a will and in the synagogue-related matter of burial fees (SEE: WOMEN IN THE SYNAGOGUE: BURIAL). Many senior citizens, it was argued, experience difficulty meeting the basic bill only to find that there are extra cemetery charges to be met on the interment of a relative.

The Hospice

Women in Ilford voiced concern that without a community hospice, many Jewish people were dying "under a cross".

Others were satisfied that certain existing British hospices were aware of key practices surrounding Jewish death and mourning and had the sensitivity to accommodate them.

Women with Disabilities

Synagogues - particularly Orthodox - emerged as one of the least user-friendly venues for disabled Jewish women (SEE: SYNAGOGUE ARCHITECTURE). While several reported special seating arrangements to the rear of the men's section, many women complained that provisions to meet their needs fell far short of the ideal.

Even those with no personal experience of disability felt that good wheelchair access was important - Edinburgh suggested Shabbat lifts - as well as a loop system for the hearing impaired. Manchester expressed the view that communities should do more to encourage women with a variety of disabilities including the mentally ill to participate in communal life. Large print prayer books for the visually-impaired, suggested by Leeds, are already in use in Liverpool. Some went on to claim that being a stranger, widow or divorcee was felt by some to be in itself a form of disability.

Widows and 60 Plus

"There is nothing as invisible as a middle-aged woman on her own."

Although some women in this age band were still in couples, the majority were widows living on their own. Loneliness featured highest on their agenda of concerns. Even in communal gatherings, synagogue or social events, women were conscious of a sense of isolation and public holidays were found to be especially difficult.

Most widows felt that they were no longer included in gatherings to the same extent as they had been when they were part of a couple. But equally, when invited to participate at parties and communal events, they felt conspicuous, revealing a sense of discomfort at being a lone woman among other couples. In the experience of some widows, losing a partner affected some of their existing friendships with married

Women in The Jewish Community: Review and Recommendations

women from whom they felt “set apart”. Some felt forgotten by both Rabbi and community after their husbands’ death and in some cases were actually deleted from the membership list, even where the husband had been an active member of a synagogue over many years (SEE: WOMEN IN THE SYNAGOGUE). Nevertheless, Leeds drew attention to the fact that it was still easier for women with a history of involvement in synagogue life to continue to do so following the death of a partner than it was for a newcomer to “break in” alone.

Widows in their 40s reported a profound feeling of detachment from their contemporaries. They spoke of social awkwardness and a sense of conspicuousness, an “odd” woman at wedding receptions and other social gatherings.

Sixty-plus widows unanimously craved mental stimulation, suggesting clubs, cinema outings, bridge evenings, and lecture gatherings as a constructive way forward. However, this desire to get out and develop an active social life of their own was counterbalanced by the unanimous fear of going out by themselves on a dark night and returning to an empty house alone at the end of the evening.

Leeds women revealed the success of a taxi service in their city offering a safe and familiar service to women and the elderly. Others believed that communities could play a part in organising lifts for those in need. Several women drew attention to the fact that without transportation of their own it became increasingly difficult to visit the graves of their loved ones.

Most older women expressed a preference for remaining in their own homes and retaining their independence for as long as possible. However, many felt undermined by inexperience in a number of areas traditionally regarded as men’s work: financial planning, car maintenance and DIY. Many would welcome practical workshops to assist them in acquiring basic skills such as fitting plugs and changing fuses.

Among the demoralising effects of widowhood, many women believed that younger people perceived them as ineffective and dependent on others, neither capable nor useful. A number of fit, active and energetic sixty-plus women considered themselves a significant resource for the community but some felt that they received little recognition for their worth and experience. However, women in Birmingham maintained that many dynamic over-sixties defended the right to lead their lives and would not wish to be channelled by others into grandmotherly roles for which they did not consider themselves ready.

Although some widows clearly felt isolated after their loss, the Survey showed that for many widows, the synagogue was perceived as fulfilling a positive role. 51 out of a group of 62 widows gave details about the variety of help they had received from the community at the time of their bereavement. Among the generation of widows who regarded themselves as traditional, the majority refuted the suggestion that synagogues cater mainly for families.

Experiencing a Bereavement - the Central Orthodox Position

Women agreed that while the rituals surrounding Jewish death and bereavement have long been considered the exclusive province of men, their needs can no longer remain unacknowledged.

Overwhelmingly, women insisted that they should have the right to attend funerals if they felt inclined to do so. Considerable numbers felt that it was not only unjust but also extremely unfeeling to ban a woman from attending the funeral of someone with whom she was closely connected, purely on gender terms. Many of these women expressed their hurt and anger at having been prevented from doing so.

Examples of a prolonged grief reaction were heard from women who insisted that their mourning was made more traumatic by their exclusion at this time. Yet such is the opposition of some Rabbis to women's presence at funeral services that reports were received of Rabbis refusing to officiate at the ceremony because of women's attendance. It was suggested that in situations where the Rabbi felt unable to proceed in the presence of a woman, the best course of action would be for him to nominate a colleague (SEE: RABBIS).

Over and over again, women expressed the need to mourn publicly - "like the men". They felt angry at being asked to leave the room during prayers at a Shiva house and many women endorsed the view that parallel arrangements should be made for them to pray too. However, the most intense heat was generated over the issue of Kaddish. Passions ran high as women throughout Britain expressed their profound wish to be 'among the other mourners for Zion and Jerusalem'. It was agreed that an only child or a woman in a family of daughters should have a special entitlement.

Several women reported that although on becoming mourners they had instinctively wished to say Kaddish, they lacked the energy to fight for the right at such a vulnerable time and in an emotionally weakened state. Here again, women insisted that official guidelines were necessary to clarify the issue; if a woman begins during Shiva must she continue throughout the Shloshim and the remaining year? May women say Kaddish on a Yahrzeit? What are her obligations? "Rabbis must assume responsibility for educating men and women in these matters" (SEE: KNOWLEDGE - ACQUIRING THE TOOLS).

It was noted with satisfaction that a number of synagogues had begun to offer women the option of saying Kaddish in the ladies' gallery at synagogue services; informing the Rabbi before the beginning of the service was the only requirement. Yet it was felt that most synagogues perpetuate the view that a woman saying Kaddish is acting inappropriately or "making waves". Several women reported that they were more observant than their brother/s and that they would undertake the obligation of Kaddish more conscientiously. It was suggested that women could organise and publicise their own Kaddish support groups to accompany the female mourner, sit with her, rise with her and respond to her Kaddish.

Women in The Jewish Community: Review and Recommendations

The central Orthodox position on women's Kaddish has been awaiting resolution for decades as an excerpt from *The Jewish Chronicle*, dated February 12th, 1943, reveals:

“At last Sunday's memorial service for the Rev. Hyman Goodman, Minister of Hornsey Synagogue, after Miss Joyce Goodman, an only child, had said Kaddish for her father, Dayan Harris M. Lazarus told the assembled company that he approved of this gracious act, it being both dutiful and logical. Would I be correct in inferring from this welcome statement that the Beth Din of which Dayan Lazarus is such a valued member, sanctions the recital of Kaddish by daughters, irrespective of whether there are sons, thus removing an injustice to Jewish women which has deprived them in the past of doing honour to departed parents? Perhaps such a sanction already exists, but if so I do not think it can be very widely known, otherwise I feel sure that greater advantage would be taken of it.”

Yahrzeit as a “non-event” for women was another recurring theme (SEE: WOMEN IN THE SYNAGOGUE).

“Every year on the Yahrzeit for my father, a battle of wills ensues in my family to get my brother, a reluctant shul-goer, to attend shul. How stupid that I as a regular shul-goer cannot pay my respects to my father in any way that is of communal note. In fact, if I go alone, no-one in shul knows that I have a Yahrzeit and as a result I have never been wished ‘long life’.”

The standard letter received by women before a Yahrzeit offers the option of nominating a man to mark the event by proxy: “If you wish a male relative to be called up on your behalf...”. Many women believe that this is an artificial formula, distancing and denying them the opportunity to express a personal loving duty. “What are women to do who have no male family member to call on?” (SEE: SINGLE WOMEN).

Manchester drew attention to the practice of deferring memorial prayers from the main Sabbath morning service to a smaller afternoon Minyan if it conflicts with additional services to mark a festival. Under these circumstances, women felt strongly that synagogue wardens should be informed of the need for screens to accommodate women mourners in the Bet Midrash so that they should not be deprived of hearing the memorial prayer for their departed relative. Glasgow women registered their regret that the Yizkor prayer does not include a text to mark the passing of a husband or child. There was general agreement for the view that both Rabbis and synagogue congregations have a particular role to play in ensuring the wellbeing of mourners during and post bereavement although few believed that this was discharged fully.

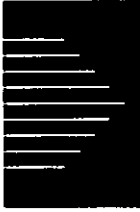
Burial Rights

Although it was reported that some women's sole reason for remaining affiliated to a synagogue was in order to safeguard their right to be buried in a Jewish cemetery many widows were often unclear as to their exact entitlement (SEE: WOMEN IN THE SYNAGOGUE).

For many women the first occasion on which they became conscious of those rights was immediately following the death of their partner. It was suggested that to allay any fears, anxious widows should have their entitlement fully explained by the appropriate synagogue authority. Some went further, adding that widows' financial situations should be taken into account when the levy is set and the scope for discretionary fees widened. A Jewish burial insurance scheme was an idea arising from discussions on burial fees, widely considered to be "extortionate".

Chevrah Kadishah

Women referred to the importance of this work and how moving and meaningful it had been to participate in the Mitzvah of Taharah.



Executive Summary: Get and Agunah Working Party Report to the Chief Rabbi

Introduction

We members of the "Women in the Community" working party on Divorce and Agunot hereby present our report.

Our terms of reference were set out by the Chief Rabbi in his article "Women in the Decade of Renewal" as being:-

1. To listen to the concerns of women throughout the community.
2. To draw up appropriate methods of response.
3. To ensure the process is guided throughout by the values and principles of Jewish Law.

They were further defined in the paper headed "The Chief Rabbi's Working Party on Women in the Jewish Community - Aims and Objectives" as inter alia:-

"to look for some halachic movement in the specific areas of marriage and divorce. Fields of examination might be the Jewish view of pre-nuptial contracts and halachic movement in Get legislation (Agunot)"

With these in mind and for the purpose of this Report we have:-

1. Consulted with a number of Rabbanim, Dayanim and Clerks to Batei Din in this country.
2. Received and considered numerous representations from Agunot and others who have been involved in acrimonious divorce disputes.
3. Consulted with lawyers in this country and in Israel with a specialist knowledge of English and Jewish divorce law, and with members of the Jewish Marriage Council.
4. Considered solutions within the civil legal framework being at present advocated and/or tested in Australia, the United States of America, Canada and South Africa.

Scope of our Enquiries

We have interpreted “Agunah” not in its literal meaning of “deserted wife” but in its wider modern definition of a woman “chained” in a marriage and have considered, therefore, the disability of women who:-

1. Divorced in civil law are unreasonably refused a Get by their husbands.
2. Divorced in civil law are refused a Get except in return for material reward or harmful rights in respect of the children.
3. Divorced in civil law are unable to obtain a Get because their husbands suffer from serious mental disability or impairment.
4. Widowed without children are unreasonably refused Chalitzah by their brother-in-law or where he demands material reward for doing so.
5. Widowed without children where the brother-in-law is not free to marry her because he is already married, or suffers from serious mental disability and cannot give Chalitzah or is too young to do so.
6. Remains married to a husband who has deserted her and /or has disappeared.

Response of the Clergy

Whilst we find that all the members of the clergy to whom we have spoken throughout the country are sensitive to the issues raised and hope for a satisfactory solution one day, we find that, collectively, they have lacked a sense of urgency.

There seems now, however, to be a greater awareness of the need for action, particularly amongst members of the various Batei Din whom we have consulted. Judicial members of our working party have visited the London Beth Din to witness the Get Procedures at first hand and were extended every courtesy. They were impressed both with the professional yet sympathetic approach of the court and with the frank and forward looking discussions held with Dayan Ehrentreu and his colleagues.

We believe that there is no area of traditional Judaism today in which it is more urgent to review our customs and practices and to re-examine the interpretation of Halachah than in the area of Get and Agunah. The voices of distress of so many women in the community are crying out to be heard and they demand the compassion and urgent interest of the clergy.

Reasons for the Urgency of the Situation

Whereas we accept without reservation that the sanctity and stability of marriage is basic to the Jewish philosophy of life, we nevertheless must take note of the rapid increase in the rate of civil divorce to at least 1 in 3 marriages ending in divorce.

We anticipate many problems will arise as a result of Jewish marriage breakdown effecting questions of divorce and the ability to remarry, the status of children etc. and we believe that the solution to these problems may well hinge on whether or not a Get has been obtained.

We consider it of the utmost importance that our children be educated at an early age into Jewish values on relationships, ethics and the sanctity of marriage in order to attempt to stem the tide of divorce. Such education should be encouraged in the home, in the school and youth club and by spiritual leaders to try to offset the dangers of the secular and permissive society in which we live.

1994 has been designated by the United Nations as "The International Year of the Family". This is an added reminder to us of our responsibility to the next generation. We must try to ensure that as many obstacles as possible are removed from a parent who wishes to remarry and thus re-establish a normal family unit for the children. In this spirit it is urgent that the problems associated with Get and the Agunot are given urgent consideration.

Difficulties in Researching this Project

We have been unable to examine case files at the Beth Din because of the issue of confidentiality and there is no central communal registry which stores, records or collates relevant information and statistics. However, we have obtained some useful information from the Demographic Unit of the Board of Deputies.

Our research has shown that there are still cases which remain unsolved after as long a period as 18 years. Good practice requires that more resources be allocated to the monitoring and following up of unresolved Get cases.

We recommend that details of every case file be entered on computer. A database should be drawn up to record details inter alia of the names of the parties, relevant dates and the state of religious and civil proceedings and, if appropriate, the way in which the Get was solved. Further, all statistics recorded annually with the Board of Deputies should be entered on the database, and the advice of the Principal Registry in this regard should be sought.

The Statistics

The statistics we have obtained are confusing. The Community Research Unit of the Board of Deputies indicates a total of 271 Gittin pronounced in 1991 in both the Orthodox and Reform Communities. Our own research appears to suggest that the number is far in excess of this.

In any event the rate of divorce between Jewish couples is underestimated as many couples follow secular procedures only. We have no way of knowing how many Jewish couples are granted a civil divorce. We suspect that many people may not apply for a Get because of the commonly held belief that difficulties will be placed in their way, causing delay and distress.

Recent studies have shown that only half of those couples married in synagogue and subsequently divorced obtain a Get. In the mid 1980s we know that about 400 Jewish couples were divorcing annually and that these figures were rising rapidly. Using these figures one can extrapolate that one Anglo-Jewish child in six will have experienced family break-up before the age of 16.

In order to alleviate difficulties which can be caused by delay, The Leeds Beth Din are prepared to expedite the Get procedure and have, in one instance quoted, concluded proceedings in 24 hours. This example is impressive and could well be followed where "time is of the essence" in resolving a Get.

The average cost of obtaining a Get is about £250 but, inexplicably, the London Beth Din charges considerably more for non-members (£420). The Reform Beth Din charges a fee of £105. All these fees are considerably higher than the cost of an undefended civil divorce (£60). We are told that concessions will be made in cases of need. We would urge that all these costs be reduced and standardised.

Differing Standards in the Community

As we would expect different standards apply in different sections of the community.

The Orthodox Community

Much hardship and suffering can be caused to a wife trapped in a "limping" marriage i.e. where there has been a civil divorce but no corresponding religious divorce or Get. The parties are not free to remarry in an Orthodox religious ceremony. Our information is that, to date, the Beth Din have over 200 unresolved cases in their files and the numbers appear to be escalating rapidly. The last available information is that the London Beth Din alone deals with about 230 Get applications each year.

Divorce jurisdiction is exercised by no less than 6 Batei Din of the different Orthodox communities in London and in the Provinces.

The Masorti Community

Members of the Masorti Community are always required to consult the London Beth Din for a Get, as the Masorti religious authorities will not act in these matters.

The Reform Community

The Reform Synagogues will issue a Get irrespective of the necessary formalities. They regard the marriage as effectively ended on the issue of a Decree Absolute or an annulment. They insist on religious dissolution by Get before authorising either party to remarry in synagogue, but will recognise a Get issued by an established Beth Din.

Dissolution of the marriage is effected by the Reform Beth Din:-

1. By a form of traditional Get where the consent of both parties has been obtained, or with the consent of the husband only where the Court has exercised discretion in his favour.
2. By a document replacing the traditional Get:-
 - a) When the wife refuses to co-operate without giving reasons or for reasons which are irrelevant to the proceedings.
 - b) When the whereabouts of the former spouse are unknown.
 - c) When the former spouse is unable to plead.
 - d) When the former spouse is presumed dead.

Where a former spouse contests the competence of the Reform Beth Din by declaring that he or she is Orthodox, proceedings are adjourned for a Get to be obtained from an Orthodox Beth Din. If the respondent refuses to co-operate with the Orthodox Authority, the Reform Beth Din will proceed in the matter.

The Liberal Community

The Liberal Synagogue has abolished the Get and accepts civil divorce as conclusive. Nevertheless Liberal Judaism requires a divorced man to offer a Get to his former wife before allowing him to remarry. This is to ensure that he does not vindictively make it impossible for her to remarry in an Orthodox synagogue should she ever so desire.

Conclusion

We recognise the dangers that can result to the community as a whole when there are diverse standards. Unless a way is found to alleviate the problems of Agunah within Halachah we fear that more and more women will turn to the Reform and Liberal Synagogues to solve their difficulties in order to remarry. This is already happening and will inevitably lead to an increase in the numbers of mamzerim.

Are there Differences within the Orthodox Community?

With the absence of a central or communal method of recording or filing case papers and decisions and with 6 Orthodox Batei Din exercising Get jurisdiction, we cannot

ascertain whether the same standards are applied in each Beth Din or if there are any material discrepancies between them in their interpretation of Halachah. This is obviously unsatisfactory and we urge that a unified Beth Din be set up as the accepted legal authority.

We were concerned to learn how little time the Dayanim of the London Beth Din can devote to Gittin because of their other responsibilities. We respectfully recommend that a Dayan be immediately designated, on a full-time basis, to deal specifically and exclusively both with new cases and the backlog of existing on-going cases and to act as a Co-ordinator with other Batei Din.

Results of Failure to Obtain a Get

The ability of parties to remarry according to Jewish law has become a burning issue and requires urgent consideration because when a woman without a Get purports to contract a second marriage to a Jew, any children born to her as a result of this second union are "Mamzerim", who may never marry within the community and whose status is passed on to future generations in perpetuity. The woman herself is deemed to be living in adultery. A woman is forbidden ever to marry, in a religious ceremony, a man with whom she has committed adultery. Children born to her from an adulterous relationship are "Mamzerim".

We are concerned that more and more women will ignore the prohibition on remarriage without Get, either through ignorance or through real or perceived difficulties in obtaining a Get. This is a tragedy for the whole community which will result in the inevitable dilution of the Orthodox Community. Further, some women are expressing their dissatisfaction by deserting together with their families from the Orthodox to other communities.

It is an anomaly that if a woman enters into a second union with a non-Jew, her children will be Jewish and may not be Mamzerim. The consequences of such a law speak for themselves.

As there is no civil divorce in Israel any Agunah who goes on Aliyah can have no hope of remarrying in Israel.

We recognise that we cannot alleviate the suffering of some Agunot, but we owe it to future generations of women to do our best to ensure that they do not suffer the same fate.

Mamzerut

A mamzer is not as is often erroneously believed, the issue of an unmarried couple. Although a sexual relationship between an unmarried couple is prohibited in Halachah,

a child born in such a relationship is, nevertheless, “legitimate” in Jewish law and the parents of such a child are permitted to marry each other.

A mamzer is the issue of a prohibited (adulterous or incestuous) relationship, or is the child a woman has with another partner when she has not terminated her first marriage with a proper Jewish divorce.

The parents of a child born out of any of these relationships are forbidden by Jewish law from ever marrying each other, no matter what they may do to try to rectify the previous error.

Jews are strictly forbidden to marry the sons or daughters of such a forbidden union. In the words of the Torah “A mamzer may not enter into the community of Israel unto the tenth generation”. A mamzer may only marry another mamzer or a proselyte. The descendants of a mamzer remain forever forbidden as marital partners. The status of a “mamzer” is inferior to that of a non-Jew who converts to Judaism and is thereafter considered a normative Jew in virtually every respect.

The injustice to the child because of the sins of his parents is a cause of great sorrow and anxiety, not only to the family of the mamzer, but to the whole community. In many cases we believe the situation of mamzerut arises from ignorance of Jewish law. It is our duty to ensure that all young Jews understand the Jewish law in relation to Get and mamzerut and are made aware not only of the importance of obtaining a Get on marriage break-up, but also of the sin of causing a woman to become an Agunah.

Prohibited Marriages

There are two categories of marriage invalid under Jewish law.

1. A marriage which is not recognised as such and which may, therefore, be terminated without a Get. This includes:-
 - a) Marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew (although the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father is Jewish).
 - b) Incestuous marriage.
2. A marriage which is prohibited and must be dissolved by Get. This includes:-
 - a) The marriage of a Cohen to a divorcee, a woman who has performed the Chalitzah or a convert.
 - b) A marriage to a woman with whom one has had sexual relations while she was married to another, even after she is divorced or widowed.
 - c) Marriage to a mamzer. However a mamzer may marry a person of the same status.
 - d) Marriage to one’s divorced wife if in the interim she has married another.

Bigamy

Bigamy may take two forms:-

1. Marriage with a woman who is already married to another.
2. Marriage with an “additional” wife.

In the first case, not only is the second marriage null and void, but also the woman becomes prohibited from both men because of adultery. Any child of the union with the second man, conceived before a valid Get has been obtained from the first, will be a mamzer.

The second type of bigamous marriage is banned because of Rabbinic Ordinance. The Torah permits a man more than one wife but polygamy was formally banned by Rabbenu Gershom of Mayence by the beginning of the 11th. century. This ban can be lifted through a Rabbinic Court in cases of extreme distress eg. a wife’s insanity rendering her incapable of normal family life. There is, however, no such relief for a wife in similar circumstances.

Annulment

A solution to the problems of Agunot can be achieved by resorting to “Hafka’at Kiddushin” or (retroactive) marriage annulment.

Annulment disposes of the need for a Get or for Chalitzah since it assumes that no valid marriage has ever taken place.

A proposal has been made that a **Takannah** should be enacted by the Rabbinate in Israel whereby marriages are annulled retroactively according to Jewish law. The authority for this proposal is found in the Talmud:-

“He that marries a wife does so on the strength of Rabbinical precepts and the Rabbis may forfeit his marriage (if he contravenes such precepts).”

If this proposal were to be accepted and applied universally it would abolish the requirement of the Get. Nevertheless the principle of immutability of traditional Jewish law may not be violated.

The Recalcitrant Wife

We recognise that men can also be trapped within a “limping” marriage because their wives will not accept a Get. However the disadvantages to women are alleviated in the case of the husband in that children born to him as a result of a second union are not mamzerim, and, provided their mother is Jewish, they are Jews against whom no religious disability attaches. Further a husband is not prohibited from marrying an

unmarried woman with whom he has committed adultery, as under Halachah such a relationship is not considered adulterous.

A husband may also remarry without a Get where:-

1. The wife is suffering from a mental disability and is unable to understand the Get proceedings.
2. The wife commits adultery and refuses a Get.
3. "Heter Meah Rabbanim" The signature of 100 Rabbanim from three different countries are obtained approving his remarriage.

The Get

In Jewish law a Get is required to dissolve a marriage between two Jews which was solemnised under Jewish law. A Get may also be required where a Jewish man and a Jewish woman, eligible to marry, have cohabited, creating a de facto marriage in Jewish law.

The Get is a handwritten document in particular form, written on the instructions of the husband by a trained scribe and signed by two witnesses competent in Jewish law. The Get is then handed over by the husband to the wife in the presence of two competent witnesses and a valid Jewish court, which regulates how the document is written and the ceremony performed.

In Jewish law there are no "grounds" needed for divorce other than the mutual consent of the parties, and the divorce is effected, in essence, by the parties themselves not by the decree of the court (Beth Din). Hence the requirement that the husband deliver the Get by hand to his wife. In practice, however, if the parties do not wish to meet or the husband cannot be present, he can formally appoint a proxy to act on his behalf. He need not then attend but the wife must do so as the document must be physically passed over to her as it is this act of handing the document over which constitutes the divorce.

We are concerned that, despite the sympathetic and professional approach of the Dayanim, some women have experienced feelings of discomfort and isolation in the procedures adopted by the Beth Din. We respectfully suggest that Notes of Guidance should be issued to the parties beforehand to advise them as to the proceedings and further that another woman be allowed to be present during the proceedings to give support to the wife in what must clearly be seen as an ordeal.

Can a Wife Compel Divorce?

Historically there are restricted circumstances prescribed in Jewish law where a husband can be compelled to deliver a Get (Mishnah Ketubot 77a). In Israel the courts may, as

a final resort, force a husband to give a Get by means of imprisonment and, since 1948, fifteen men have been imprisoned in this way. In the Diaspora, however, the power of a Rabbinic Court to compel a husband to give a Get is limited to moral or social persuasion, provided that this does not amount to unacceptable coercion.

It is what is meant by “unacceptable coercion” that causes concern. Rabbinic authorities appear to differ in their understanding and interpretation of coercion and coercion in civil and halachic law do not coincide. For some, coercion is anything that makes a man act against his will, but Rambam argued that coercion is acceptable in certain circumstances. The theory is that a man really wants to give a Get but is unable to do so because he cannot overcome his evil inclination “so that if pressure is exerted on him....then his better inclinations can prevail”.

Our researches have revealed numerous examples of pressures that have been exerted, including financial, various manipulations in respect of custody and access to children, maintenance and property rights etc. We are informed that the Beth Din is not aware of these pressures. If correct, this is unacceptable and immoral. Whatever is done must be done openly and precedents of acceptable procedures be made public. The present situation brings disrepute upon those who perpetrate the system and the whole community.

We respectfully urge the Chief Rabbi and the Beth Din to issue acceptable guidelines.

Helping an Agunah is often compared to Pidyon Shevuyim (freeing from slavery) and is one of our greatest mitzvot. The Gemarah points to examples of powers that the Beth Din can use in these circumstances and Maimonides confirms the power of the Beth Din asserting “they may act in accordance with the needs of the time”.

Historically there are several examples of our sages reinterpreting, suspending, or circumventing even biblical rules.

The Mishnah in Gittin 88b states:-

“A Get given under compulsion exercised by a Jewish court is valid”

and the Shulchan Aruch asserts:-

“It is a mitzvah for every Beth Din everywhere and every time to force the recalcitrant husband to give a Get. If one finds fault with a Get (which has already been given) he is to be flogged for causing mamzerim” (Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 134:5).

Beating is no longer acceptable in our modern society and, today it is right to substitute penal and/or financial orders where corporal punishment would once have been inflicted. The financial order in the matrimonial case of Brett v Brett [1969] 1 ALL ER 1007, was accepted by the Beth Din in the circumstances of that case as not constituting an improperly coerced Get.

We would respectfully urge the Chief Rabbi to accept the principle that it is acceptable to substitute financial penalties for flogging as a means of securing a Get.

Communal Sanctions

We now consider the communal sanctions that can be imposed on a man who refuses to give his wife a Get. In one case which has come to our attention a man was ostracised by his community for refusing to give a Get until he relented and agreed to do so and in another a Rabbi refused a father a mitzvah at his son's barmitzvah for refusing to give a Get. These are strong measures used to help right serious wrongs done to the women of the community and could, with effect, be emulated throughout the community as a whole. We believe that few men could withstand a show of public contempt and the forfeit of all privileges of membership of a synagogue. We submit that the seriousness of the situation warrants such a course.

The Geonic Takanah of the 6th. Century created almost total equality between men and women seeking a Get by confirming the principle that a Get could be obtained by one spouse against the wishes of the other by order of the Rabbinic Court. This practice ceased in the Middle Ages and Rabbeinu Tam considered that it was an emergency measure enacted by them for their own time and was not for future generations to follow.

In Israel, during this "Year of the Agunah" (1993), legislation is being enacted to deprive a recalcitrant husband of his passport and driving licence and to prevent him from opening a bank account or using a cheque book or credit card. Strong emergency measures for what is acknowledged as an emergency situation.

The circumstances of our time, when the rate of marriage breakdown and divorce threatens the whole fabric of Jewish society, cries out for a similar emergency response in this country today.

Chalitzah

A woman (the Yevamah) whose husband dies without children becomes subject under Jewish law to the rules of Levirate marriage under which it is the responsibility of her late husband's brother (the Levir) to marry her. The Levir must perform the degrading ceremony of Chalitzah, renouncing his obligation to marry his brother's widow in order to release her to remarry another of her choosing.

The Yevamah can become an Agunah in various circumstances where the brother is either unable or unwilling to perform the Chalitzah ceremony.

We are aware of the strict halachic rulings in this matter and regret that we could find no relevant statistics, however we would point out that the present procedures can become a blackmailer's charter.

The Need for a Get Agency

We were concerned to learn that some members of the clergy are ill-equipped to deal with the problems of Get. Good intentions are not sufficient in dealing with these matters.

It is our view that problems arising out of marital breakdown should not be handled by Rabbanim who, no matter how well intentioned they may be, are untrained in this field, but by properly trained men and women, who not only understand and accept Halachah but also are well versed in both religious and civil law and trained as counsellors to liaise with the parties at the earliest possible opportunity to help them reach amicable agreement.

We therefore recommend that a national Get Counselling Service, funded by the community, be established as soon as possible and suitable men and women be appointed and trained to deal with this important work.

In London the Get Advisory Service of the Jewish Marriage Council undertakes this task and we pay tribute to the remarkable efforts of Leonard Finn and his colleagues. However, the time has come for the community to shoulder its responsibility on this issue. **The trauma of divorce can be far reaching and damaging, not only for the parties themselves, but for their children who may carry the effects into later life and relationships.** We believe that the early intervention of an agency trained in marital breakdown could help to minimise these problems.

In December 1993 the Lord Chancellor's Department issued a Green Paper entitled "Looking to the Future - Mediation and the Ground for Divorce". The consultation paper has recommended the introduction of mediation as a universal 'first step' on the road to divorce. This proposal recognises the potential long-term damage to the parties and to the children of the family which can be caused as a result of confrontational civil divorce proceedings. It seeks to redress the balance through mediation which "encourages couples themselves to resolve disputed issues.....tends to reduce emotional suffering for the parties and their families.....(and) tends to result in longer-lasting arrangements for the parties and their children." **We believe and recommend that a Jewish Family Mediation Service should be established in order to meet the specific needs of the Jewish community, with a full and clear understanding of Jewish family traditions and practices and able to educate and mediate on matters relating to Get as well as civil divorce.**

In Israel, where the need to deal with Get sympathetically is recognised, two programmes have recently been established to train women pleaders to operate within the Rabbinic Courts and trained counsellors are used to help solve problem cases. We welcome this initiative which points the way forward to help women in the present, the family in the future and the community for all time. These are our hopes and aims.

Options within the Civil Law

Although we consider that the community should be capable of solving its own problems, we, nevertheless, considered a number of possible alternatives within the framework of the civil law although we express no view as to whether or not a civil court would consider them to be contrary to public policy, namely:-

1. Various legal authorities and precedents.
2. The recognition of Get proceedings to effect a divorce.
3. The use of a maintenance order.
4. Contract Law.
5. Get Clauses and Undertakings.
6. Proposed Legislation.
7. Pre-nuptial Agreements.

1. Various Legal Authorities and Precedents

We have considered numerous cases and considered many articles and reports both from this country and abroad, including the articles and proposed amendment to the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 drafted by Professor Freeman of London University.

2. The Recognition of Get Proceedings to Effect Divorce

The case of *Maples v Maples* [1987] 2 All ER 188 confirmed that the granting of a Get is regarded as an extra-legal action and, therefore, cannot dissolve a marriage according to English law.

3. The Use of a Maintenance Order

In *Brett v Brett* [1969] 1 All ER 1007 the Court of Appeal found that they were entitled to make provision in the maintenance order for the possibility that the husband might persist in his recalcitrance to refrain from granting a Get. In this case the Court took note of the additional plight and need for lifetime financial support to an orthodox Jewish wife who is unable to remarry until the husband has granted a Get. The court also came to the conclusion that the husband's failure to apply for a Get was due to the hope that he could use his power to bargain and avoid payment of maintenance.

4. Contract Law

It has been suggested (*Jewish Tribune* July 1992, Zeidman) that one solution to the problem of Get may lie in the realms of the Law of Contract. The contention is that since a Jewish marriage is a contract encapsulating the agreement between the parties to the marriage, it is an implied term of that contract that in the event of marriage

breakdown both parties will consent to a Get. Further a Jewish marriage entered into "Kedat Moshe Ve'Yisrael" may infer an agreement to abide by the directions of the Beth Din under whose auspices the marriage was celebrated.

Where a party is in breach of contract a civil court may award damages to the innocent party or may make an order obliging a guilty party to fulfil his bargain. This "Order for Specific Performance" could oblige a party to a marriage to grant or accept a Get, and the ultimate sanction for refusing to comply with the order of the court could be imprisonment.

Many authorities, however, do not consider this approach viable.

5. Get Clauses and Undertakings

A period of two years separation may be followed by the grant of a civil divorce with the consent of both parties (S.1 (2) (d) Matrimonial Causes Act 1973).

It is widely accepted that this consent may be conditional upon the granting or accepting of a Get and that unless this condition is fulfilled no order will be made. This follows the principle confirmed in *Beales v Beales* that the Respondents consent to divorce may be conditional (in this case on not paying costs).

Jewish couples are now encouraged to incorporate a "Get Clause" into the Agreement which then becomes part of a legally binding Court Order, which will usually have the effect of persuading both parties to proceed with the Get. In contested matters where parties give an Undertaking regarding a Get, the Undertaking has the same effect as a Court Order.

Where one party reneges on this Agreement and attempts are then made to enforce the Court Order, we suggest that the Civil Court is acting in these matters as the agent of the Beth Din in enforcing the Get Clause and that this should not be considered "coercion". An urgent ruling of the Beth Din is required on this issue.

6. Proposed Legislation

Legislation has already been enacted in some states in Canada, the United States of America and Australia and is in the process of being enacted in South Africa authorising a court to defer the granting of a Decree Absolute of divorce until any religious ban to remarriage has been removed.

Leo Abse M.P. attempted to promote similar legislation in Parliament in the early 1980s and introduced a Private Members Bill. Professor Freeman of University College, London drafted the relevant sections for inclusion in a Matrimonial Causes Bill. Unfortunately, when the Law Commission finally reported in 1991 they did not promote the suggested amendment and it is now virtually impossible that the matter will be brought before Parliament in a Private Members Bill again.

There is a need for the recognition of Jewish divorce procedure by the English matrimonial law and legislation should be passed to remove the hardships suffered by Jewish spouses who are unable to remarry in a Jewish religious ceremony. Furthermore, consideration should be given to the recognition of a Get as a valid divorce. It is an anomaly that whilst Jewish marriage ceremonies are recognised, religious divorce proceedings are not.

7. Pre-Nuptial Agreements

The Jewish Marriage Council favours the use of the pre-nuptial agreement as it places a moral pressure on parties to accept responsibility for their actions after a marriage breakdown and enables the Beth Din to be involved as arbitrator. We concur with this view.

A number of engaged couples have already expressed a wish to sign a pre-nuptial agreement before marriage.

This is an agreement between a couple who are intending to marry whereby they agree that they will accept the decisions of a named Beth Din in the event of the parties initiating or obtaining a Civil Divorce, and that they will accept and be bound by the decision of that Beth Din as to whether or not a Get should be given.

Following the principle laid down in the case of *Shahnaz v Rizwan* [1964] 2 All ER 993 QB it would appear that the civil courts will uphold the rights of women married in religious ceremonies "to obtain from their husbands what was promised to them".

Opinions amongst Rabbanim and Dayanim differ on the halachic acceptability of pre-nuptial agreements, but an accepted leading authority Rabbi Moshe Feinstein drafted a proposed pre-nuptial clause, believing that this clause is permitted and a Get obtained as a result of its use would not be a forced Get.

"If after the marriage they G-d forbid separate, then the husband will not refuse to give a Get and the wife will not refuse to accept it, if a Beth Din so commands."

Other authorities have also recommended and drafted proposed pre-nuptial agreements and we have noted, in particular, those drafted by Dayan Berger and Professor Rabbi Ze'ev Falk, Professor of Family Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

We note that the (Orthodox) Rabbinical Council of America has sanctioned the use of the pre-nuptial agreement as halachically valid and has advised its use. Other authorities in this country and in the U.S. are suggesting, as an alternative, the insertion of relevant clauses into the Ketubah.

We would respectfully urge the Chief Rabbi to consider urgently the viability of such agreements which could well prevent many problems and much suffering from arising in the future. We would respectfully suggest that it be a condition precedent to the solemnisation of a marriage in a synagogue that:-

1. The officiating minister certifies that he has explained to the engaged couple the laws and customs relating to Jewish marriage and divorce. We believe that if this is done within the framework of a general discussion on marriage and the Jewish home that it will be welcomed by many couples who are pleased to be better informed on these matters.
2. The couple have signed an approved pre-nuptial agreement.

Other Problems Revealed by our Research

We believe that some of the problems facing the Beth Din at the present time arise because of a fundamental change in society. We respectfully suggest that urgent consideration should be given to ruling on the following situations:-

1. Where the parties live considerable distances apart, even in different countries, can a method be devised of substituting a written method of release for ceremonies of Get and Chalitzah?
2. Where there is in existence a pre-nuptial agreement can an arrangement for reciprocal acceptance of the document be agreed between Rabbanim of different countries?
3. By Tractate Yevamot 65a-Shulchan Aruch Even Ha Ezer 154, a man is obliged to give his wife a Get if he is impotent. This rule has been extended to cover cases where a husband refuses to live with his wife, the fiction relied on is that he has refused to do so because he is impotent. Can this rule be further extended to assume that a husband who files a petition for civil divorce no longer wishes to live with his wife and can therefore be compelled to give her a Get?
4. By Tractate Mishnah Ketubot 77a, a man who suffers from boils, other serious ailments or follows an unacceptable occupation is obliged to give his wife a Get. Can this rule be extended to cover Aids or other serious physical or mental conditions?
5. Can a penal or financial sanction of a civil court replace flogging in those cases where a husband can be compelled by force to give his wife a Get?
6. Can consideration be given to the possible wider use of retroactive annulment of marriage in preference to Get?
7. Can consideration be given to the problems associated with the refusal or inability of a brother-in-law to grant Chalitzah, and to inserting in a pre-nuptial contract or conditional Get a clause that the marriage should be deemed to be null and void in certain named eventualities, thus overcoming the problem of Chalitzah?

Conclusion

Whereas we accept that the problems of Get and Agunah have been considered by Rabbanim for centuries it cannot be denied that these problems have acquired a new and urgent dimension in this generation.

We accept that there is a pressing need to educate the public to an awareness of the importance of Gittin and for each couple contemplating marriage to understand the issues involved.

Most particularly, in view of the greatly increased rate of divorce in the Jewish community and the fact that problems arising from a husband's withholding of a Get may result in grave injustice for the woman, this Working Party recommends that:

1. A Dayan be appointed to the London Beth Din with the single designated task of dealing specifically with Gittin, monitoring and following up cases of unresolved Gittin.
2. The pre-nuptial agreement, as announced by the Chief Rabbi, be made a requirement for the solemnising of all marriages in synagogues under the auspices of the Chief Rabbi.

The need for and the implications of the pre-nuptial agreement should be carefully explained to the engaged couple by the officiating Rabbi before the wedding day.

3. The Chief Rabbi should issue guidelines on what he considers to be acceptable coercion.
4. A professional and appropriately funded Get Counselling Service should be established as a matter of priority in London and in the major centres of Jewish population.
5. A Jewish Family Mediation Service should be established in line with the recommendations in the Lord Chancellor's Consultation Paper "Looking to the Future - Mediation and the Ground for Divorce" December 1993.
6. The training of Rabbanim - both in preparation for communal service and as part of their on-going training - should give adequate instruction on Get counselling in situations of marital breakdown. Also, as an essential aspect of their pastoral care, Rabbanim should be required to have a working knowledge of how best to refer couples on for appropriate professional guidance.
7. A recalcitrant husband should forfeit all rights and privileges of membership of a synagogue, including burial rights and the honour of being given a mitzvah until he grants a Get. All synagogues should be advised to amend their constitutions to include these provisions.

All communal organisations should also include in their constitutions a clause that such men should not be given positions of authority.

8. The name of a recalcitrant husband who unreasonably refuses to give his wife a Get should be made public.
9. It is recognised that, in certain cases, Get or Chalitzah is withheld until there has been a substantial payment of money or until unacceptable conditions have been agreed to. This Working Party strongly recommends that this practice is publicised as abhorrent and is denounced as alien to Jewish ethics.
10. Regarding administrative matters:
 - a) The whole system by which Get applications are processed should be computerised.
 - b) A straightforward guide for litigants explaining Get procedures should be drawn up and sent immediately upon application.
 - c) Consideration be given to ways of standardising and reducing the costs of obtaining a Get.
11. Further attempts should be made to seek legislation restricting the grant of a Decree Absolute of Divorce until all religious bars on remarriage have been removed.
12. The Chief Rabbi and the Dayanim are respectfully urged to convene a gathering of worldwide halachic authorities with the courage and authority to decide how to implement all possibilities within Halachah which can prevent the status of Agunah from being incurred.

The above recommendations are confined to our observations on Get. Our findings have, however, also revealed many cases of considerable distress resulting from the status of mamzer being perpetuated through the generations as a result of an Agunah being left with no option other than to make a subsequent union outside Orthodoxy.

We also wish to make the observation that the present situation relating to Agunot has, particularly over the past two decades, resulted in the births of thousands of children halachically deemed mamzerim.

Addendum

Since writing our original Report we have been encouraged to learn that several recommendations made in that Report are in the process of implementation by the London Beth Din.

1. A Get Clause for incorporation in the Ketubah has been drafted by Dayan Ehrentreu and approved by the other members of the Beth Din. This clause will be incorporated in the English abstract of the Ketubah. The Chief Rabbi held a press conference together with three members of the working party in October 1993 in order to announce this major breakthrough.

2. A computer programme is to be set up to record details of all Gittin and cases of adoption within the community.
3. A comprehensive booklet for the guidance of litigants explaining procedures is to be made available to all.
4. It is envisaged that women helpers and advisers will be available to litigants on each occasion the Beth Din is dealing with Gittin.

We warmly endorse the proposed changes of the London Beth Din which we believe will help to alleviate the problems of Get for future generations.

Reports from the Regional Working Parties on Divorce and Agunot

REGIONS: BIRMINGHAM, BOURNEMOUTH, EDINBURGH, GLASGOW, ILFORD, LEEDS, MANCHESTER

Introduction

The terms of reference of the Regional Working Parties were the same as the London Working Party, namely those set out by the Chief Rabbi and expressed in the first part of this Report.

Many of the regional groups, aware of the legal research being undertaken by the London Working Party on Get and Agunah, decided not to replicate that same work. Instead they chose to concentrate their efforts on listening to the concerns of women in the community about these issues. They also consulted with lawyers, members of the Jewish Marriage Council, Dayanim and Clerks to the Batei Din.

All the regional groups received comments from women on the procedure of Get at Batei Din; most groups, in addition, have presented case studies from women who were prepared to share their personal and often painful experiences. Manchester investigated possible social and communal pressures that could be brought to bear upon recalcitrant husbands.

This review will present those views under the following headings:

1. Response of the clergy to Agunot.
2. Procedure at the Batei Din.
3. Communal and social sanctions.
4. Results of failure to obtain a Get.

Response of the Clergy to Agunot

It was recognised that the attempts of the clergy were at all times intended to help the Agunah. Women recorded the following ways in which the clergy have attempted to persuade a recalcitrant husband to grant a Get:

1. Writing letters to the husband.
2. Visiting the ex-husband.
3. Threatening public exposure.
4. A Dayan hinted that if the Agunah “could give him something” i.e. money, that it may help the situation.
5. Another Dayan also advised trying to pay the husband off.
6. A Dayan raised the money himself to give to a recalcitrant husband who subsequently gave the Get.

These experiences illustrate the consequences of differing interpretations of what constitutes ‘unacceptable coercion’ by the clergy (SEE: CAN A WIFE COMPEL DIVORCE?).

The feelings of one woman sums up what many women have expressed, “it is ironic that the husband cannot be forced to grant a Get, but he can be bribed.” The feeling of women is that there is no united response from the clergy and that whilst there may be a leniency as regards some of the methods of persuading a recalcitrant husband, there is no corresponding leniency applied to the wife to free her from the status of Agunah.

Women have expressed this feeling in different ways:-

“I once said to Dayan X that women are second class citizens in the eyes of Orthodox Judaism and that the laws are antiquated and archaic and he replied that I was not the first to say this, nor will I be the last.”

“Do women have to wait forever?”

“Dayan Y told me it was G-d’s law. I told him he should tell G-d it was 199-!”

Procedures Adopted by the Batei Din

It was the feeling of all the regional groups that the Get ceremony itself was a source of dissatisfaction for women and could also be a confusing, lonely, demeaning and alienating experience. Whilst the Dayanim from all Batei Din were mostly seen as sympathetic on an individual basis, many women found the procedure itself less sympathetic to their needs.

The problem arose in the following areas:-

1. There was no receptionist to welcome the woman.
2. The ceremony was not explained to the woman either before or during the ceremony.
3. There was no other woman present.
4. There were no facilities to allow the parties to wait in separate rooms.

Women have also experienced a lack of consideration in other ways; not being introduced to the Dayanim; lunch being offered to the husband but not to the wife; during the ceremony one woman was told by a Dayan that he felt a reconciliation was possible.

Other women who had more positive experiences noted the courtesy with which they were treated and that the Dayanim had explained what was going on and had translated any Hebrew used. Both positive and negative experiences point strongly towards the need for clear and careful explanations of the procedure. This could be done by the Dayanim or by Notes of Guidance issued to the parties beforehand.

On the application of a party to receive a Get, the Beth Din should suggest that the woman might wish to invite another woman to accompany her as support.

The Manchester Working Party suggested that the Jewish Marriage Council could provide assistance and advice about the Get procedure and on the day of the ceremony a counsellor be present to offer support if required.

Feelings expressed:-

“I was not treated as a person of any consequence”

“Nobody...talks about it or tells you what is going to happen. There was no discussion about the procedure or the effects and the significance of the divorce - namely what they were actually doing.”

“I felt it was very cold, unhelpful and I didn't feel as if I knew what had gone on.”

“They treated you like you were nobody.”

Communal and Social Sanctions

This area was looked at in detail by the Manchester Working Party. They met with Dayan Krauz to discuss the possibilities of withholding synagogue membership and synagogue privileges from a recalcitrant husband, and also of withdrawing the right to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. The social sanctions they considered were the refusal of membership to communal committees.

Any sanctions imposed must not amount to 'unacceptable coercion'. The Dayan felt that certain sanctions would fall outside this definition if they amounted to 'privileges'

rather than 'rights'. Privileges could include not giving Aliyot to recalcitrant husbands and not granting or renewing synagogue membership. Refusal of membership to communal committees could also be possible. Refusal of burial rights would need further consideration.

There has been a case where a recalcitrant spouse was refused membership to three synagogues, but these bans were later lifted without reasons or consultation with the wife.

The Working party recommended a common policy and machinery for enforcement to be set up on a national basis with the approval of the Chief Rabbi.

Results of Failure to Obtain a Get

1. Children

Divorce is a difficult time for children and the problem is intensified where there are problems over the granting of a Get. Women have reported that children have felt humiliated by their father, have felt anger and in some instances opted out of the Jewish community entirely.

2. Agunot

Agunot have, in different ways, expressed feelings of anger, sorrow and humiliation at the way their lives have been affected by a recalcitrant spouse. They have felt outrage and bitterness that they cannot remarry in a synagogue and have felt expelled from the community.

The life of an Agunah is put in limbo if a recalcitrant husband will not consent to a Get. The choices for a woman in this situation can be bleak; some women have felt unable to remarry until they are granted a Get and remain alone, although their 'husband', divorced in civil law, in many cases remarries unencumbered. Other women have chosen to cohabit with a partner, although they would like to remarry and be seen as husband and wife in the synagogue and in matters such as mourning. Yet others have chosen to remarry in a Reform Synagogue ceremony, or have chosen a civil ceremony, or have married out. Of those women who have remarried, several stated that they have remained childless because of the status of 'mamzer' placed on any children born to prohibited relationships.

All the women who spoke to the regional working parties have expressed grief at being forced into these options - none were undertaken without much pain and heart searching. They have felt driven out of the community by virtue of their status of Agunot through no fault of their own.

Feelings expressed:-

“...because he will not sign on the dotted line I am unable to remarry in an Orthodox Shul.”

“As a matter of interest, the Reform Shul would give me a Get and remarry me.... It goes against my upbringing to change to Reform, but one can understand why people are opting out of Orthodox Judaism.”

“This is why more and more people marry through the Reform Synagogue.”

“...a convert can marry in the synagogue and is therefore better than me, and a woman who has gone off with a non-Jewish man and even had children by him and who subsequently wishes to marry someone Jewish can marry in the synagogue, unlike me....I was not as good as them.”

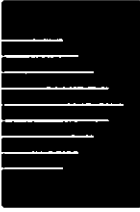
“How is it that a non-Jewish woman can convert and get married under a Chuppah but I cannot - and they look down on me because I am not married.”

“I wish that I had been told about Get when I married and had had a pre-nuptial agreement.”

“I am now a widow. I am now a free woman.” (after thirty years as an Agunah).

Concluding Remarks

This Report records the voices of women in our community. These voices have told us of immense pain and personal tragedy that occurs within the Jewish community today. The London Report has drawn up appropriate methods of response. Taken together, these Reports require urgent consideration and we respectfully urge the Chief Rabbi and the Beth Din to lead the community in the mitzvah of Pidyon Shevuyim.



Executive Summary: Survey Report

This report outlines the findings of a postal survey of 1350 British Jewish women. It includes detailed analyses of their *characteristics* and their *attitudes to communal issues*. The main findings are summarised below.

Jewish Belief, Practice and Identity

Jewish women vary significantly in the form and intensity of their religious *beliefs, practices and ethnic identity* (i.e. sense of peoplehood). The sample as a whole can be classified into four distinct religious 'types'. These are based on the respondents' self-classification of their Jewish lifestyle and cut across categories of synagogue membership.

The fourfold religious typology has been used throughout the study as the basis for examining communal attitudes and opinions. The characteristics of the four types are as follows:

Traditional Jewish women comprise 40% of the sample. They are characterised by (i) a strong commitment to a selection of key, family practices which are observed by virtually all women in the group and (ii) a sense of attachment to the wider Orthodox community, although this does not extend to the full observance of Orthodox practices. Traditional women have very high levels of *ethnic identity* and moderate to low levels of religious *belief*.

Non-Orthodox women comprise 43% of the sample. They see themselves as having a religious identity (as opposed to being purely secular Jews), but falling clearly outside the Orthodox domain. Women in this category observe fewer *practices* than Traditional Jews and tend to emphasise annual group ceremonies (e.g. Seder) rather than regular, individual rituals (e.g. Kashrut). Like Traditional women, they have a high level of *ethnic identity* but low scores on items related to religious *belief*.

Secular women comprise 9% of the sample. These respondents define themselves as non-practising, although most of them engage in occasional religious ceremonies at various times in the year (most commonly Seder, Hannukah). Although both religious

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practice and *belief* are virtually absent, the strength of *ethnic identification* is almost as strong as in other groups.

Strictly Orthodox women comprise just under 9% of the sample. These women have consistently high scores on all three dimensions of identity. They are the only group in which a full commitment to Jewish *practice* appears to be driven as much by fundamental religious *beliefs* as by a desire to express their *ethnic identity*.

In the sample as a whole, there are remarkably high levels of ethnic identification and far weaker levels of religious faith. Thus over 90% of respondents have a strong desire for the Jewish people to survive; they wish to identify with other Jews and say that they 'feel Jewish inside'. However, less than one third agree with statements concerning the existence of God or the special relationship between God and the Jewish people; by comparison Israeli Jews are twice as likely to endorse such statements.

The finding that British Jewish women are on average agnostic (and men more so) has implications for Jewish education, particularly in the context of attempts to harmonise educational and family values. It is suggested that the dissonance between the prevailing belief systems of the home and the school may prove more difficult to reconcile than differences in standards of religious practice.

In all groups other than the Strictly Orthodox, ethnic identity is found to be a better predictor of Jewish practice than is religious belief. In other words, the desire to belong and identify seems to have more influence on religious observance than fundamental aspects of faith and belief.

From an educational point of view, this introduces a second form of dissonance, not between belief in the home and school, but between belief and practice *within* the home. For the majority of the women in this sample, ethnic identity and religious practice coexist with minimal levels of faith. This, too, raises questions concerning the transmission of religion based primarily on ethnicity and ritual.

Social Demography

The social characteristics of the two sub-samples - synagogue affiliated and unaffiliated - are described in this chapter. The affiliated group is further sub-divided between Orthodox and Progressive synagogue members.

The majority of affiliated women were married and slightly less than half the unaffiliated were married or cohabiting. The vast majority had borne children of their own, but single parenthood (among those who had not married) was not a noticeable pattern. Nevertheless, 11% of the unaffiliated were divorcees bringing up children.

In line with the overall geographical distribution of British Jewry, the majority of respondents lived in the Greater London area. Synagogue members were aged 48

years on average and the unaffiliated had an average age of 39. Orthodox women were some 2 years older than their Progressive counterparts.

Over half the synagogue sample and three-quarters of the unaffiliated were in paid employment, with the synagogue members more likely to be working part-time. One quarter of synagogue members were retired.

Both samples show a strong bias towards the middle-class with high levels of education and with household salary levels above the national average. Among synagogue affiliated women, 26% had a university degree (more than twice the national average) and 42% of younger affiliated women (below 35) had a degree. However the most accomplished sub-group educationally were unaffiliated women: 74% of those under 35 had a university education.

The synagogue sample also brought to light 7% of households with a total income of less than £8000 per annum, mainly respondents aged over 60. The overall communal experience of low-income is understated in the sample since women over 70 were, as far as possible, excluded from the survey. Nonetheless, communally affiliated Jews and unaffiliated Jews living in Jewish areas are overwhelmingly middle-class. This may be why people who have politically radical values feel they have no place in the synagogue-focused community.

The four classes of religious identity - Secular, Non-Orthodox, Traditional and Strictly Orthodox - had different social characteristics. *Strictly Orthodox* women were younger, very likely to be married and secularly less well educated. *Traditional* women were older and, like the Strictly Orthodox, more likely to be married and with less secular education. *Secular* women were distinguished by their low marriage rates and very high levels of formal education. The *Non-Orthodox* were also well educated, but average with regard to age and marriage rates.

Family and Social Issues

The majority of respondents had been married at some stage in their lives, usually in a synagogue, and saw their marriage as a life-long commitment. Only 7% of partnerships were outside this normative pattern. Similarly, the majority of women had borne children (85% synagogue women, 57% unaffiliated), and those who had not, generally wished to do so in the future. There was, however, no evidence that those women who do not currently have children feel pressured into having children.

Of those who had been married, about 10% of the synagogue sample and 32% of the unaffiliated sample had been divorced. In the 112 cases where a *get* was required (i.e. excluding mixed faith marriages), approximately 33% of the respondents (affiliated and unaffiliated together) did not have one. Put another way, where there has been a divorce of two Jews, the wife is likely to have received a *get* in two out of three cases.

Attitudes towards family roles and task-sharing were less traditional than were family structures. There was still the feeling that women are mainly responsible for general domestic jobs, but child-rearing practices were regarded as responsibilities to be shared between parents.

Those mothers who work reported some difficulty in reconciling the demands of work and motherhood, but these problems were not of a specifically Jewish nature. At a more general level, there was some evidence of difficulty accommodating Shabbat requirements to the demands of the workplace and, to a lesser extent, of antisemitism at work.

The proportion of respondents (6%) defining themselves as sole carers of a relative was below the national average, but this was augmented by the 24% of affiliated women who felt themselves responsible for a parent's welfare with someone else. Strikingly, all respondents felt they would be called upon to care in this way at some time in the future. However, they showed low levels of knowledge of the extent to which Jewish communal welfare provision would be of help to them.

Approximately half the respondents did voluntary work in some capacity, with affiliated women being more likely to help with a Jewish activity. Some volunteers would appreciate further training in their role.

Being Single

For the most part, with the predictable exception of divorcees, respondents were content to be single. Affiliated singles felt that the community has a place for them, while just under half the non-affiliated expressed a level of disaffection that presumably keeps them from joining synagogues. These women were more likely to agree that the Jewish community is less welcoming to singles than is society at large.

The social characteristics of the unmarried highlighted two stages in a woman's life-cycle: younger persons waiting to be married and older women who had been married in the past and generally had no particular wish to meet a new partner.

Jewish singles groups and events are widely used as a means of meeting partners, but there is great dissatisfaction with the Jewish singles 'scene'.

While historically men have been inclined to marry outside the community, the data indicate that women are now also widening their search for partners, especially on re-marriage.

There is only a low incidence of single-parenthood in the samples. Where there has been a divorce, fathers do not seem to be involved in their children's Jewish upbringing.

The community, through its burial societies and synagogues, is generally found to be quite supportive at the time of bereavement. The older women who were naturally most likely to have had this experience denied feeling isolated from synagogal life.

There are suggestions of a residential/generational pattern with regard to singles' perceptions of the community; younger, London-based singles are more critical than older singles and those living in the provinces.

Intermarriage

A substantial minority of respondents (30%) have a fatalistic attitude to intermarriage, believing nothing can be done to reduce it. This attitude varies dramatically with religious conviction - 53% of Secular Jews have this view, while at the other end of the continuum, only 4% of the Strictly Orthodox subscribe to it.

Most respondents find intermarriage ideologically unacceptable as signified by their disapproval of intermarriage even if the status of children was not involved; but only the Traditional and Strictly Orthodox would do 'everything possible' to prevent a son or daughter marrying a non-Jew.

Respondents seem uncertain as to what personal action they would take to prevent a child marrying a non-Jew. Most emphatically, cutting-off from the community is no longer an option, even for half of the Strictly Orthodox respondents. This explains the strong demand for a more relaxed view on orthodox conversion and a desire to welcome would-be affiliates. Those currently single and/or unaffiliated have the least definite viewpoint.

The sample includes a number of people with experience of inter-faith partnerships - either directly by partnership with a non-Jew or indirectly through a member of the family. Some respondents had themselves married-in. Overall, 10% of the affiliated and 39% of the unaffiliated had, at some time, been in an inter-faith relationship.

When extrapolated to give national patterns, the survey data suggest that 3.5% of women synagogue members aged 70 and under were raised in another faith.

There are demographic pressures tending to encourage intermarriage among Jewish women, over and above any general trends towards assimilation. These pressures arise from the current excess of women over men in the 20-29 year age bracket *and* the greater tendency for men to intermarry than women. These factors produce a proportionate deficit of Jewish males which must increase the likelihood of female intermarriage.

Religious Life

This section of the report is concerned with women's attitudes towards institutions and religious practices at the core of Jewish life. Topics include the Synagogue, the Rabbinate, the Beth Din, the Mikveh and the observance of Kashrut.

The Synagogue

The synagogue-affiliated community is simultaneously shrinking and polarising; synagogue membership has declined by about 25% in one generation and the concentration of membership in the Central Orthodox sector is shifting gradually to the Progressive, and to a lesser extent, the Strictly Orthodox wings.

Many Jewish women are dissatisfied with synagogue services and find them 'inappropriate to their needs'. Almost half the respondents (45%) said that they had *never* attended a synagogue which they found acceptable from the point of view of a woman. This percentage was much lower for members of Progressive synagogues (23%) and higher in the Central Orthodox sector (56%) and among the unaffiliated (69%).

Those attending United Synagogues and other Central Orthodox synagogues were not only less likely to have found a satisfactory synagogue, but even those who had found one, often found it in the Progressive sector; about 40% of 'satisfied' Orthodox members came into this category. In contrast, members of Progressive synagogues invariably found satisfaction within their own synagogal grouping.

An attempt was made to analyse the causes of dissatisfaction. Predictably, there was a high level of agreement with statements endorsing women's *equal rights* with regard to representation, visual access and 'ownership' of the synagogue. The content and strength of these preferences did not differ greatly between Traditional and Progressive women, although naturally Progressive women were less likely to have their preferences frustrated.

In general, concern over *equal rights* did not seem to discourage women from attending synagogue; i.e. frequent attenders were no less concerned about these matters than those who stayed away. The factors that were most closely associated with attendance or non-attendance related to the perceived *ethos* of the synagogue - its spirituality, openness to outsiders and willingness to provide explanations.

Rabbis and Alternative Services

Attitudes to Rabbis were generally positive as far as their treatment of women was concerned. Although Progressive Rabbis appear to be somewhat more approachable than their Orthodox counterparts, very few respondents reported serious problems in regard to communication with either group. However, other evidence suggests that Rabbis, at least in the Orthodox sector, are not very effective as agents of communal development; this may have implications for the way in which women's concerns about the *ethos* of the synagogue are addressed.

There were generally low levels of interest in women's prayer groups and other alternatives to the synagogue, but considerable interest in the development of new forms of prayer to be associated with important life events. With the exception of the

Strictly Orthodox, there was particular support for the suggestion that women be permitted to say Kaddish on appropriate occasions.

The issue of the legitimacy or otherwise of women Rabbis split the respondents very clearly on denominational lines. Non-Orthodox respondents supported the idea vehemently on the basis of general principles - equal opportunity and the right to personal fulfilment. Traditional women were almost universally opposed, but their opposition was largely emotional, rather than principled, and their attitudes were sometimes apologetic. It was suggested that Traditional attitudes are likely to be eroded in time because they lack a coherent, underlying value system.

Trends in Synagogue Attendance and Membership

The frequency of synagogue attendance has increased in recent years, particularly among women. Overall, about 26% of men and 17% of women attend at least weekly - about twice the level to be found in the USA. Rates of attendance are higher among Orthodox than among Progressive respondents and the balance between male and female attendance differs; far more men than women attend Orthodox synagogues, while in the Progressive sector there are marginally more women than men. These differences are not entirely due to Sabbath restrictions which affect Orthodox women with young children.

Comparison of parents' and daughter's synagogue affiliation revealed a systematic shift away from traditional forms of Judaism over one generation. One third of the daughters of Orthodox synagogue members moved to Progressive synagogues and one third of the daughters of Reform members moved to Liberal or unaffiliated groupings. The data suggest that British Jews are leaving traditional Judaism at roughly the same rate as Jews in the USA and that the current increase in Reform numbers may be eroded as the next generation moves further to the religious left. There is a smaller flow from Central to Right Wing Orthodoxy, but this could not be measured accurately in the present survey.

The Beth Din

Ratings of various Batei Din by women who have dealt with them suggest that they are reasonably efficient, but sometimes lacking in courtesy and sensitivity to the needs of women. There is evidence that some of the criticisms levelled against the Beth Din may be coloured by dissatisfaction with the outcome or ruling, and that those with direct experience are less critical than those who are affected indirectly. The London Beth Din received poorer ratings than other Batei Din on measures of courtesy and sensitivity, but it was seen by some women as making an effort to improve the quality of its service and to address difficult problems in a sympathetic manner.

Kashrut and Mikveh

As Kashrut is a daily, personal ritual, variations in its level of observance provide a sensitive index of community changes in religious, as opposed to ethnic, identity. Most respondents make at least some gesture towards the observance of Kashrut - for example, 84% will not bring pork into their homes - but relatively few (less than 9% of affiliated women) observe Kashrut consistently inside and outside the home.

There is evidence of a significant decline in Kashrut observance among younger respondents; and many women who buy Kosher meat for the home, adopt quite different standards outside. Such inconsistency, which is located mainly in the Traditional sub-group, is associated with a lack of religious faith paired with a desire to maintain ethnic identification by means of home-based practices.

The 48% of respondents who do not eat Kosher meat at home, generally express a lack of belief in the Mitzvah, but those from the Traditional sub-group seem to be discouraged more by price than by religious doubts.

10% of the women in the affiliated sample regularly attend a Mikveh or used to attend one. Many of these women belong to Right Wing Orthodox synagogues and are fully observant. However, 19 (one fifth) of the women who attend a Mikveh do not observe Kashrut and some other key practices. This suggests that unusual and unexpected patterns of personal religious choice are beginning to emerge in the UK, as has recently been found among Orthodox Jews in the USA. One interpretation of this phenomenon is that ritual practice is coming to be seen as a means of achieving personal satisfaction or psychological growth rather than as a response to divine authority.

Jewish Education

Virtually all the women in our sample had some exposure to formal Jewish education, but of limited scope and intensity. Most respondents experienced a few years of part-time Jewish study prior to the age of Batmitzvah. Experience of full-time Jewish schooling was restricted to about 15% of the sample, although younger respondents and the Strictly Orthodox had higher rates of attendance.

Participation in Jewish education did not vary greatly between synagogue affiliated and unaffiliated respondents; in fact, unaffiliated women were *more* likely to have attended a Jewish school than members of Progressive or Central Orthodox synagogues. However, their children are substantially *less* well educated Jewishly.

In general, the respondents' children are being given a more extensive Jewish education than their mothers; almost 40% attend a Jewish school, and there has been a tenfold increase in the rate of attendance at (post-Bat Mitzvah) Teenage Centres. Whilst the absolute rate of attendance at Jewish secondary schools has increased, such schools

remain less popular than Jewish primary schools, attracting half as many pupils in each year group.

Although parental attitudes to the importance of Jewish education are not gender biased, in practice there is a small but reliable difference in favour of the education of boys. This is restricted to the Central Orthodox and Progressive sectors.

There has been a dramatic increase in the popularity of Bat Mitzvah and Bat Chayil ceremonies over the past 30 years. More than 40% of respondents under 40 years took part in such a ceremony (compared with 9% of 50 year-olds) and 65% of respondents intend to have a Bat Mitzvah or Bat Chayil for their daughters. This growth in the popularity of the ceremony can be traced to changes in socio-ethnic rather than religious motivation.

Over the entire sample, the trend in the practice of Bat Mitzvah and Bat Chayil is from Secular (low) to Traditional/Strictly Orthodox (medium) to Progressive (high). However, in the younger age groups the practice is now almost equally popular among Traditional, Strictly Orthodox and Progressive families.

Jewish adult education formed a significant part of the Jewish learning experience of our respondents. Almost 60% had attended classes at some time and about a third had engaged in adult Jewish learning in the past three years. This proportion is considerably higher among Progressive women who also place a greater emphasis on conceptual subjects (e.g. Jewish ethics, history) than on more practical topics (e.g. Jewish cookery). The data suggest that Progressive Jewish women may have an intrinsically stronger interest in educational self-development than their Traditional counterparts.

A detailed analysis of the impact of various Jewish educational experiences showed that family influences account for about 10%-20% of the variation between respondents, in terms of their religious beliefs, practices and identity. Once home background is taken into account, the *additional impact* of Jewish education, Bat Mitzvah and attendance at Jewish youth clubs is virtually zero and is sometimes negative.

Insofar as these findings can be generalised to contemporary Jewish education, the implication is that individual social and psychological factors may be more potent determinants of Jewish continuity than simple exposure to intense levels of Jewish education. It is suggested that there is a need to decouple the concept of Jewish education as a means of enhancing the religious life of those who are Jewishly active, from the concept of Jewish education as an agent of demographic change.



Recent Initiatives

The Report is pleased to record a few of the new programmes and activities resulting directly from the work of the Review. Other major initiatives, of particular significance and importance to the entire community, and announced since the working party was formed early in 1992, are also highlighted.

The Regional Groups in Birmingham, Bournemouth, Glasgow, Ilford, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester have included in their individual reports information on local initiatives, together with proposals for future action.

Birmingham:

LOMDA, a local programme of learning opportunities for women by women, was created to offer 5-6 week courses on such subjects as 'Looking at the Matriarchs as Role Models', 'The user-friendly Siddur', 'Hebrew from Scratch and Modern Ivrit'. It is hoped to expand the programme in the future.

Glasgow:

The "Women in the Community" group are continuing to function in order to deal with issues highlighted during the course of the Review, and as a focus for future activity.

Women attended a training programme arranged by the London Beth Din, enabling them, in co-operation with local ministers, to give support to Glasgow women when dealing with the Beth Din.

Following a meeting with the ministers, rabbis and chairmen of the Scottish Council of Synagogues, and consultations with the wives of rabbis and ministers, and women serving on Synagogue committees, it is proposed that new arrangements will be made, where required, regarding support in Synagogue for the unaccompanied sons of lone mothers; welcoming of new members and visitors to Synagogues; seating arrangements for elderly and disabled women; additional educational opportunities for women; information on the Order of Service during Shabbat and Festivals; preparation by ministers of an information leaflet for women mourners on what part

they can take in the services during Shiva; the setting up of a support group for the bereaved, in conjunction with ministers and the burial society.

Liverpool:

As a direct result of the Survey, a Bereavement Counselling Service has been established. Volunteers are receiving training in the appropriate skills.

A Rosh Chodesh group is now meeting.

Jewish Women's Network:

A national organisation launched in June, 1993, "To create a framework within which all Jewish women can engage in dialogue and to support endeavours among women across the spectrum to improve their status in Jewish life".

Jewish Women's Aid:

"Jewish Women's Aid is a group of Jewish women from every section of the community, religious and secular, who have joined forces to support Jewish women who experience domestic violence." (Registered Charity No. 519112).

Women's Prayer Groups:

The original Stanmore Women's Tefillah Group held its first service in February, 1993, with the full permission of the Chief Rabbi and within strict guidelines agreed with him, and has settled into a pattern of regular two-monthly Shabbat morning services.

Other women-only prayer groups in London and around the country, have held services to mark particular occasions such as Rosh Chodesh and Simchat Torah.

As a result of the interest and enthusiasm engendered, women are demanding and attending educational courses and Shiurim on all aspects of prayer, Tenach and other related subjects.

Representation of Women in the United Synagogue:

Positive steps have now been taken to maximise the role of women in Synagogue management at a local level and also at the level of the governing body, the U.S. Council.

Women may be elected, in equal numbers to men, to Synagogue Management Committees. Each Management Committee may then appoint two women members to the United Synagogue Council, where they have voting rights.

The Pre-Nuptial Agreement:

The Pre-nuptial Agreement is aimed at preventing situations in which the status of Agunah could be incurred. The actual wording of this Agreement is still being refined in order to ensure its enforceability in civil law, for which advice is being taken from the President of the Family Division.

The Chief Rabbi and the London Beth Din Dayanim have carefully considered the halachic definitions of coercion and are satisfied that a get obtained as a result of the P.N.A. can in no way be deemed 'improperly obtained'.

It is anticipated that the P.N.A. will shortly become a central part of all United Synagogue marriages.

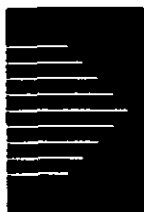
Training of Women Educators:

In January 1993, IDEA - the Chief Rabbi's 'Initiative for Developing Education for Adults' ran a two-day Seminar for Rabbi's wives and women educators. The programme was designed to provide them with information and ideas for addressing issues connected with "Women in Jewish Life". IDEA also ran an intensive sixteen week course for fourteen women educators, in conjunction with the J.L.E. (Jewish Learning Exchange) to develop their skills and abilities to teach other women.

Shiurim for Women:

The first of three sessions in a series of monthly Shiurim for Women, to enhance understanding of Tefillah and Limmudei Kodesh, have been arranged at the Yakar study centre, Hendon.

June, 1994.



Glossary

Agunah/Agunot	A woman/women who is unable to remarry in an Orthodox synagogue because her ex-husband has not given her a Religious Writ of Divorce (Get) or because she has no proof of his death.
Aliyah	Going to live in Israel.
Aliyah (L'Torah)	Calling up to the reading of the Law in synagogue.
Aliyot	Plural form of Aliyah L'Torah.
Arba Minim	The four species of plant with which one celebrates Succot.
Ark	Cabinet that stores the Torah scrolls in synagogue.
Ashkenazi	Jews of German and East European descent.
Bar/Bat Mitzvah	Ceremony on Shabbat marking entry of a boy/girl into the Jewish religious community. Traditionally age 13 for boys and age 12 for a girl.
Bat Chayil	Literally 'daughter of worth'. A group ceremony for girls who have attained the age of 12/13.
Bensching Gomel	see Birchat Ha'Gomel.
Berachah	Blessing of praise of thanks, also said before fulfilling a mitzvah.
Bet Midrash	A room set aside as a centre for Jewish learning.
Beth/Batei Din	Rabbinical Court/s giving ruling according to Halachah.
Birchat Habanim	Blessing given to children at the Friday night meal.
Birchat Ha'Gomel	Thanksgiving blessing recited by those who have been saved from acute danger to life.
Birchat Ha'Motzei	Blessing recited on eating bread at the start of a meal.
Bnot Mitzvah	Plural form of Bat Mitzvah.

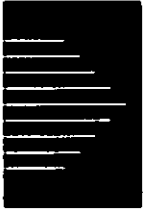
Brit (Milah)	Circumcision.
Chag/im	Jewish festival/s.
Chalitzah	The ceremony by which a childless widow releases her brother-in-law from his duty to marry her.
Challah	Shabbat bread.
Cheder/Chedarim	Hebrew and Jewish Religion Class/es.
Chevrah Kadishah	Literally 'The Holy Fellowship'. Those who are involved in performing the ceremony of ritual cleansing prior to burial.
Chuppah	Marriage ceremony/marriage canopy.
Dayan/Dayanim	Judge/s at a Rabbinical Court (Beth Din).
Diaspora	The Jewish Community living outside the Land of Israel.
D'var Torah/Divrei Torah	Religious discourse/s.
Eruv	A symbolic 'fence' around an area enabling Orthodox people to carry on Shabbat. Particularly enables the use of pushchairs and wheelchairs on Shabbat.
Etrog	The citron used on the festival of Succot.
Gemarah	The collection of commentaries on the Mishnah to be found in the Talmud.
Geonic Takanah	A religious ruling issued by the Rabbinical authorities of the 6-11 centuries in Babylon.
Get/Gittin	Religious bill/s of divorce.
Gomel	see Birchat HaGomel.
Goy	Non-Jew.
Hafka'at Kiddushin	Marriage annulment.
Hakafot	Circuits with the scrolls on Simchat Torah.
Halachah/Halachic	Jewish law or a specific ruling within it.
Hamotzei	see Birchat Ha'Motzei.
Havdalah	Ritual that marks the end of the Sabbath.
Hilchot Melachim	Laws pertaining to Kings as written by Maimonides.
Ivrit	Modern Hebrew.
Kaddish	Memorial prayer for the dead, usually for a close relative.

Kedat Moshe Ve'Yisrael	Literally 'according to the Law of Moses and of Israel': part of the formula said by the groom to the bride in a Jewish wedding ceremony.
Ketubah/Ketubot	Marriage contract/s.
Kiddush	Sanctification of the Sabbath and festivals with wine.
Kosher/Kashrut	Food permitted to Jews/Jewish dietary laws.
Levir/Levirate	Levirate marriage is the marriage between a widow whose husband has died without offspring and the brother of the deceased (the Levir).
Leyning	Reading from the Sefer Torah in the synagogue with the traditional chant.
Limmudei Kodesh	Jewish religious studies.
Lubavitch	A branch of Hasidism, an orthodox religious movement originating in the eighteenth century based, among other things, on tolerance, enthusiasm and charismatic leadership.
Lulav	The myrtle branch used on the festival of Succot.
Maimonides	Moses ben Maimon, twelfth century rabbinic authority, codifier, philosopher and physician; the most illustrious post-Talmudic figure in Judaism.
Mamzer/Mamzerim	A child/children of a married woman from an adulterous or forbidden relationship.
Mamzerut	The state of being a mamzer.
Masorti	Literally 'traditional'. A UK synagogue movement based on the teachings of Rabbi Dr Louis Jacobs C.V.E., committed to the practice of non-fundamentalist traditional Judaism within the framework of Halachah.
Mechitzah	A curtain or grille used in synagogue to separate the men and women's seating.
Mikveh/Mikvaot	Ritual Bath/s.
Minyan	Quorum of ten men for public prayer.
Mishnah	Codification of Jewish Law on which the Talmud is based.
Mishnah Ketubot	The part of the Mishnah dealing with marriage.
Mitzvah/Mitzvot	Commandment/s, obligation/s. Also good deed/s.

Women in The Jewish Community: Review and Recommendations

Mohel/im	Circumciser/s.
Niddah	A menstruating woman.
Passover	The Jewish festival in spring that recounts God's delivery of the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt.
Pesach	See Passover.
Pidyon Ha'Ben	Ceremony to redeem a first born son, 30 days after birth.
Pidyon Shevuyim	The religious duty to ransom captives.
Rabbeinu Tam	Leading twelfth century Jewish scholar.
Rabbi/Rabbanim	Spiritual leader/s of the Jewish community.
Rambam	Acronym for Maimonides.
Rebbetzin	Rabbi's wife.
Rosh Chodesh	The first day of a new lunar month.
Seder Night	The ceremonial meal at the start of Passover.
Seed	An orthodox learning project, giving people the opportunity to study on a one-to-one basis with a partner well versed in Torah.
Sefer Torah	Scroll of the Law.
Sem(inary)	College of advanced Jewish Studies for women.
Sephardi	Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent.
Shabbat	Sabbath.
Shalom Bayit	Harmony in the home.
Shalom Nekevah	A celebration to welcome a new born female child.
Shalom Zachor	A celebration to welcome a new born male child.
Sheitel	Wig worn by Orthodox married women.
Shiur/im	Lecture/s on a religious topic.
Shiva	Seven day period of mourning after the funeral of a close relative.
Shloshim	The first thirty days after the death of a close relative.
Shofar	Ram's horn blown in synagogue on the High Holydays.
Shulchan Aruch	Authoritative codification of religious law written by Joseph Caro in the 16th century.

Simchat Torah	Celebration to mark the conclusion (and restart) of the annual cycle of Torah readings.
Succot	The Jewish Festival in the autumn that recalls the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the desert living in booths (Tabernacles).
Taharah	The ceremony of ritual cleansing before burial.
Taharat Ha'Mishpachah	Laws of Family Purity including the Mikveh.
Takannah/Takannot	Legislation by a religious court.
Talmud	Collection of Jewish Law consisting of codification of Oral Jewish Law (Mishnah) and Gemarah (commentary on Mishnah).
Tanna d'bei Eliyahu	A work dealing with the divine precepts and the reasons for them, and the importance of knowledge of Torah, prayer and repentance. It is of uncertain date.
Tefillin	Phylacteries.
Tena'im	Pre-nuptial contract.
Torah	The whole body of Jewish religious law and teaching. Also, more specifically, the five books of Moses.
Yahrzeit	Memorial anniversary marking the date of death.
Yeshivah	Talmudical College usually for men.
Yevamah	A woman whose husband has died without offspring.
Yizkor	Memorial prayers said in synagogue on Jewish festivals.
Zimmun	Summoning the diners before Grace after Meals when three or more men have eaten together.



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Women in the community responded in their thousands to the Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks' initiative - an enquiry into the priority concerns of Jewish women in Great Britain today.

Launched in 1992, the project created a rare opportunity for discussion on the critical issues affecting women's lives; spiritual and material, domestic and professional, individual and communal, in the home and in the synagogue.

This report, the first of its kind ever undertaken, sets the agenda for future community action.

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