

WOMEN RABBIS IN ISRAEL

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My colleague was startled when a male congregant, a friendly chatty one, told her that she is “ten centimeters short to be a rabbi.” Only on her way back home did she realize that he was talking about her skirt length. Needless to say, this realization did not make her feel any better. Indeed, some professional experiences seem to be unique to female clergy. This article is dedicated to a specific topic: the roles, challenges, and horizons of liberal female rabbis in the contemporary State of Israel.

Short History

Until modernity, almost no Jewish women merited being in leadership positions,¹ let alone serving as rabbis. While the question regarding the ordination of women was publicly raised for the first time about 120 years ago,² the first woman was ordained (albeit in a private *s'michah*) in 1935 in Nazi Germany. It was Regina Jonas, who served German congregations and perished in 1942 in Auschwitz.³ It took another thirty-seven years for Sally Priesand to receive rabbinic ordination from Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR)/Cincinnati in 1972; the other liberal seminaries followed shortly.⁴

Today all the non-Orthodox seminaries ordain women, and eyes are lifted now to modern Orthodoxy, whose leaders fiercely debate this matter.⁵

In Israel, the first woman rabbi to practice was Kinneret Shiryon, born in the United States and ordained at HUC-JIR/New York. In 1981, Shiryon made *aliyah* and later established Yozma congregation in Modi'in. The first woman who was ordained in Israel is Naamah Kelman. Kelman received her ordination at the Jerusalem campus of HUC-JIR in 1992, where she currently serves as the dean. The following year, Valerie Stessin was the first Masorti (Conservative) rabbi ordained in Israel. Maya Leibovich, the founding rabbi of Kamaz congregation in Mevaseret Zion near Jerusalem, is the first Israeli-born woman rabbi. Currently, there are some seventy-five women rabbis in Israel, in various congregational, organizational, and educational positions.

No Longer an "Item"

A sign of normalizations in terms of the female rabbinate in Israel is that it is no longer a news item. Unlike previous years, ordination of women no longer receives attention in the press, and interviewers do not feel the need to make tasteless jokes (such as, What is the title for a rabbi's husband?⁶). Although far from being a normalized situation, in many circles, women rabbis are not an extraordinary sight; in one of our congregations that has a woman as a rabbi, a little girl asked her mother if men too can become rabbis.

As background for our discussion, let us consider first some facts about the women rabbis in Israel. Table 1 shows that women are still a minority, comprising 48 percent of the Reform rabbis. In the American Reform Movement, the gap is much more drastic (Table 2); the women comprise only 32 percent of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), but in the current ordination classes they comprise the striking rate of 51 percent. In the Israeli Masorti (Conservative)

Movement (Table 3) the gap is more moderate than it is in the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ, the Reform Movement), which is at present significantly more egalitarian than the Masorti Movement, with the same number of male and female rabbis serving in congregations, whereas only four out of the twenty-two female Conservative rabbis in Israel are presently functioning as congregational rabbis.

**Table 1. Gender Division in MARAM
(the Israeli Council of Reform Rabbis)⁷**

	Total	Male rabbis	Female rabbis
Members of MARAM	100	52 (52%)	48 (48%)
Rabbis officiating in congregations	31	13 (42%)	18 (58%)
Ordination classes of 2013–2015	13	4 (30%)	9 (70%)

Table 2. Gender Division in the CCAR⁸

	Total	Male rabbis	Female rabbis
Members of the CCAR	2,176	1,477 (68%)	699 (32%)
Ordination classes 2014–15	67	33 (49%)	34 (51%)

**Table 3. The Masorti (Conservative) Movement
in Israel⁹**

	Total	Male rabbis	Female rabbis
Members of the Rabbinical Assembly	160	138 (86%)	22 (14%)
Rabbis officiating in congregations	19	15 (79%)	4 (21%)
Ordination classes of 2013–2015	5	3 (60%)	2 (40%)

Double Exclusion

Many of the challenges that women rabbis in Israel face are not essentially different from those confronting their colleagues in North America.¹⁰ One would also expect that due to the traditionalist and even macho nature of their society, Israeli women rabbis would encounter more discrimination and suspicion. It's been said that the best Israelis can do is allow women to be ordained, but even then they cannot truly accept them as rabbis. However, often this is just part of the larger picture: the immediate problems that non-Orthodox religious Jews encounter in Israel have to do first and foremost with their liberal, modern, and inclusive values and practices, not directly with gender issues.

Non-Orthodox rabbis of both sexes have to close ranks because they are all members of the same *salon des refusés*, laboring under constant challenges to their legitimacy by the Orthodox establishment and denied funding and recognition not only by the Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox chief rabbinate but often also by the Israel Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Religion. Israeli Reform and Conservative rabbis are not authorized to officiate at weddings or burials, nor do their synagogues receive government funding as Orthodox synagogues do. The gap between male and female liberal rabbis, especially with regard to officiating in congregations and organizations, is much smaller than the gap between both of them and Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox rabbis. When Rabbi Alona Lisitsa was the Israeli representative to the Women's Rabbinic Network (WRN), she said in her 2009 address to her colleagues in North America, "We are proud to be equally discriminated against with our male colleagues by the Israeli establishment. The de-legitimization campaign against all of us is manifested in the outrageous statement by Rabbi Eliyahu, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, blaming Reform Jews for the Holocaust."¹¹

It may be surprising but since both men and women liberal rabbis are marginalized in Israel, there is more equality between them there. In fact, women rabbis in Israel seem to get to be in leadership positions

somewhat more easily than do their colleagues in the United States. Women rabbis lead some of the larger congregations in Israel, and many women serve in leadership and executive roles: Rabbi Maya Leibovich heads the Reform Rabbis Council (MaRaM), Rabbi Naamah Kelman is dean of the Jerusalem campus of HUC-JIR, and Rabbi Tamar Elad-Appelbaum served until recently as a dean of the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary in Jerusalem.

Some of my colleagues claim that women's double marginality can be advantageous as well. For some secular Israelis, a woman rabbi is intuitively perceived not only as a nonthreatening and non-authoritative figure, but also positively subversive. The religious coercion in Israel and Orthodoxy's monopoly over Judaism there causes many citizens to shy away from any form of Jewish religiosity and practice, yet some of them find a female rabbi more accessible and accommodating than a male rabbi. Even the new Hebrew word *rabbah*, the title most female rabbis prefer,¹² which sounded at first weird, falls on relatively open ears.¹³ A friend of mine who serves as an ultra-Orthodox rabbi has no difficulty calling me *rabbah* since, as he says, it is "a new thing that never existed before."

Working as a Woman Rabbi in Israel

Israeli society is very oriented around family life. Although child care centers are far from optimal, women in Israel can rely on them and on a long day at kindergartens; paid maternity leave is mandatory (albeit relatively short) and is protected by law; short distances, tight relationships, and mutual informal social support facilitate dependence on grandparents and friends for help with young children. For these reasons and due to economic necessity, in most Israeli families both spouses work outside the home. Since juggling work and family is relatively natural for Israeli women, female rabbis are among the beneficiaries.

Liberal congregations in Israel tend to be rather small and therefore, in most cases, present their rabbis with a relatively manageable

work load. Moreover, their low budgets enable many congregations to employ only a part-time rabbi (whether male or female).¹⁴ The fact that many synagogues do not have full office and maintenance support does not discourage many women rabbis, who are willing, as one of them said to me, “to get their hands dirty” by sweeping floors, arranging chairs, making phone calls, sending letters, and so forth. It seems that women rabbis often respond more readily to these extra chores than do their male colleagues.

I believe that Israel’s relatively informal and nonhierarchical work structure enables women, with what seems to be the readiness of many female clergy to be less hierarchical and authoritative,¹⁵ to fit comfortably into the Israeli rabbinate.

Aside from the cooperation of liberal men and women rabbis in Israel, women rabbis also have projects for women only. The women rabbis of the Masorti Movement formed a group called Yalta,¹⁶ which is famous for its inspiring women’s Passover seders. The women Reform rabbis form the Israeli chapter of the Women for Reform Judaism (WRJ). Lately, I was fortunate to be among four Reform rabbis who explored the topic of ritual immersion in a liberal context and eventually edited the book *Parashat Hamayim: Immersion in Water as an Opportunity for Renewal and Spiritual Growth* (Tamar Duvdevani, Maya Leibovich, Alona Lisitsa, and Dalia Marx, eds.; HaKibutz HaMeuchad, Tel Aviv, 2011, in Hebrew). Not all of our colleagues were convinced of the necessity of such an endeavor, but eventually we got much encouragement both from the IMPJ and from MaRaM.

Can Overt Sexism Be an Advantage?

Sexism and machismo can be found in every society, regardless of how progressive it may be; in Israeli society it is overt and explicit and disturbing. Still, it can be argued that a direct and blunt style, which is typical of many Israelis, may sometimes be an advantage: It is easier to detect, less subtle, and therefore easier to respond to. On the other

hand, when discrimination is covert and expressed through a veil of political correctness and propriety, it is harder to identify and it is certainly harder to respond to.

My female colleagues and I constantly confront excluding and doubting remarks made by bar mitzvah parents, board members, and school principals, as well as taxi drivers and service providers. We respond to statements like "separation between men and women always existed in the synagogue" by explaining that that isn't necessarily so. We readily tell those who claim that "when a woman is standing on the bimah, congregants will look at her as a woman, not as a rabbi," that our femininity does not contradict our professionalism; on the contrary, it shapes it and enhances it. When young couples tell us that they would really love it if we officiated in their wedding but they "just cannot do it" because their old aunt would freak out to see an officiating female rabbi, and they need a male rabbi, preferably with a beard (to look like a "real rabbi"), we warmly wish them *mazal tov*, and hope that their children will feel otherwise.

Obviously, we do not always have the patience to engage with this kind of conversation, but our everyday experiences provide us with many opportunities to confront sexist attitudes. We believe that responding to these kinds of "petty" questions can affect the whole society, not just the individual. In many cases, prejudice and intolerance vanish when a personal connection exists, and the personal, as we all know, is also the political.

In the last few years, we have experienced a disturbing wave of women's exclusion from the public sphere in Israel. Ultra-Orthodox circles pressure companies and publishers to avoid using pictures of women, not only in commercial advertisements but also in official government publications. Women and even young girls are being harassed for not wearing "modest" cloths, and due to the fear of extreme circles, female singers are not invited to many public events, including military events. These phenomena are not new but they have become more extreme and more frequent in the past few years, and the novelty

of the past year or so is that many people openly protest against them. The backlash of these developments is a strong antireligious sentiment as well as the endowment of non-Orthodox expressions of religiosity, and especially of women leaders, whose very being is a bold response to the exclusion of women.

A short anecdote to illustrate this: in my own neighborhood in North Jerusalem, the French Hill, a project among many other local initiatives has recently taken place, as a protest against the exclusion of women in our city. The young leadership of the neighborhood has decided to place large posters of women of different occupations all around the neighborhood. Alongside the teacher, the scientist, and the musician, I was asked to participate as a rabbi. Apparently a rabbi is now one of the feminine “neighborhood professions”!

Ironically, the new awareness of the presence of women in the Israeli public sphere, and the dangers to Israeli democracy caused by those who want to eliminate their participation and their images, has begun to cause larger circles of Israelis to appreciate the missing female voices from the generations-old Jewish choir. We women and men who serve as rabbis in the State of Israel pray that both democracy and pluralism will thrive in the years ahead, so that our voices can be raised more in praise than in protest.

At the end of 2013, Israel’s attorney general made a historic announcement that the State of Israel will fund the salaries of Reform and Conservative rabbis who are employed by regional councils. Rabbi Miri Gold, the rabbi of Gezer, provided the case upon which this decision was based. Although the road is still long, it seems that things are indeed changing for Israeli liberal Jews. Of course, the change affects liberal Jews everywhere, and thus it affects Jewish life overall.

What to Call a Woman Rabbi

One of the questions that emerged early on in the history of women’s ordination in Israel was what to call a woman rabbi.¹⁷ At first glance it

would appear that this is only a technical question, but it is well known that a person's professional title has a great deal to do with how one understands one's professional persona. The question of the appropriate title for a woman rabbi is not separate, really, from other questions about professional titles that were limited at one time to men. For example, there are women who function as academic secretaries who wish to be called by the grammatically masculine form (*mazkir*) instead of the feminine form (*mazkirah*), which implies a more technical and auxiliary nature of the job. Until just a short time ago women who were "ministers" with the government of Israel were called by the male designation *sar*; only lately have they been referred to as *sarah* in the female form, and now we even have a *roshat memshala* (prime minister in feminine form). In this regard, it seems to me that the women's rabbinate takes the question beyond the purely linguistic realm and even beyond common custom.

Dr. Zvia Walden, an Israeli linguist, interviewed twenty-nine Israeli women rabbis for purposes of addressing this issue and has demonstrated that the matter of professional title among women rabbis is quite a live question and arouses quite lively feelings.¹⁸ As noted, nearly twenty years had passed from the time of the first woman's ordination in the United States in 1972 until the time of the first ordination of a woman in Israel; and nearly a full decade passed from that time until 2001, when Mira Raz was ordained with the title *rabbah*.

Kinneret Shiryon, the first woman to fill a rabbinic position as such in Israel, told Walden about the efforts she expended along the way to finding the appropriate title. She asserted,

"After I arrived in Israel in 1983, I wrote a letter to the Academy of the Hebrew language [the legal Israeli authority in matters of language]. I received the answer that the appropriate term for a woman serving in the rabbinate was *rabbanit* [the Hebrew pronunciation of the term *rebbeitzin*], but since that term was used for wives of rabbis, they advised a different term....I was naïve, and decided that I would teach the Israel society to call the rabbi by

an appropriate title, so I took up the title *rabbanit*...and that didn't work. Then I decided to 'go with' *rav*. That way they would understand who I am. It is grammatically awkward but at least I wouldn't have to waste time explaining what I meant."¹⁹ The advantage in using the title *rabbanit* would be that this is an already existing word that is recognizable in Hebrew; yet the disadvantage of the word was that it was already "taken" and therefore Shiryon finally rejected it, as did the other women in the rabbinate.

Walden specifies several proposals for a title for a woman in the rabbinate during the recent decades, and among them has been *rabit*,²⁰ *rabat*,²¹ and more. In the convention of the organization *Kolech* (literally, "your voice"), the Israeli organization of Orthodox women, consideration was given in 2009 to the title that one would associate with a woman who would receive rabbinic ordination. The discussion was interesting especially in light of the fact that Orthodox women had not yet become eligible for the rabbinate and so the question was more cultural and symbolic. Among the names in this instance that were favored were *chachamah* (a title parallel to a title that is used among Sephardim), *maharat*²² (an acronym for rabbinic teacher of halachah), and again, *rav*. The title that was ultimately preferred was *rabbah*. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, no explicit reference was made to the fact that this title is already in use by many of the women from non-Orthodox streams of Judaism. Rachel Keren, the head of *Kolech*'s executive committee, said, "In the title-choosing contest, we wanted to make the community aware of the need for this need [for women to be religious leaders]. We figured that a public discussion about this subject would encourage women to keep studying."²³ That is to say that the idea was that giving a name to something that is not yet a reality may encourage its being established as something that actually exists.

But, whereas within the world of Orthodoxy the question of what to call women rabbis might be interesting as a matter of "creative midrash," within the non-Orthodox world the midrash becomes more pragmatic and serves to respond to the actual needs of women who are

already serving as rabbis. As of today two professional titles have been used by women who are serving in the rabbinate, and lively argument and a plethora of jokes surround them: *rav* and *rabbah*. When a woman is ordained in the Israeli Reform rabbinic program at HUC-JIR, she is asked what should be written on her ordination certificate.

Those who favor the label *rav* point out, as does Kinneret Shiryon, that this term is one that requires no justification or explanation and that using this term serves to emphasize the equality between men and women of the rabbinate. They further contend that the term *rabbah* could wind up being understood as designating an entirely different profession, an innovative position of lesser status. Those who favor the title *rabbah*, on the other hand, stress the importance of normalizing the title, as is the case with so many titles and professions that have a masculine and feminine form. That is how it should be with the rabbinate, goes this argument, and the feminine form of the title, they argue, emphasizes both their gender and the fact that they have been ordained.²⁴ In opposition are those who argue that the word *rabbah* is not yet an official word and may even sound strange,²⁵ and suggests that many words in Hebrew that sound familiar today were once new and may have sounded peculiar, for example, *gerev* (stocking), *iparon* (pencil), *kaletet* (cassette tape). Yet this claim seems not to carry much weight any further, for the title *rabbah* is recognized and no longer requires an explanation. As an example of this, I would recall what I wrote above about the poster in my neighborhood whose title requires no explanation.

Everything that has been said so far deals with the preference of the women themselves—those who are affected by their titles; their religious temperaments and personal style are an important part of their preferences in this regard. But as is well known, it is the Academy for the Hebrew Language that determines matters of linguistic propriety. As I said above, the first efforts in the 1980s and '90s resulted in the response that the word *rabbanit* (parallel to *chazanit*, a woman cantor)²⁶ would be used, and until the beginning of the new decade the Academy did not really respond to the question regarding the proper title for

women in the rabbinate. In a consultation with the Academy's telephone service (customary with some regularity in Israel, where there are community "call-ins"), the response I received was that if the Academy would designate a proper term, it would likely propose a separate term with regard to the rabbinate, probably *rabbah*, but that it would not do so, because that might suggest that the Academy is recognizing the legitimacy of women rabbis.²⁷ But with the changing reality, and with the fact that there are considerably more women rabbis, the Academy for the Hebrew Language in its effort to pay attention to the zeitgeist has recently published the following response with regard to the appropriate term for a woman rabbi:

The feminine form these past generations is *rabbanit* (following the fact that the plural is *rabbanim*), but the actual meaning of this term is "the wife of a rabbi," and therefore for contemporary usage, we use the term *ishah-rav*. There are those who believe that just as *malkah* can be the same as *ishah-melech* or *eishet melech*, so the term *rabbanit* could serve (in double service, as it were) as *ishah-rav*. But those who have requested this response were not satisfied with *rabbanit*, and therefore the proposal developed of *rabbah*, which is itself a feminine form of the description *rav* (like the construct *today rabbah*). Therefore it seems appropriate that the word *rabbah* has some standing within the community as the feminine form of *rav*.²⁸

NOTES

This essay is an expansion of a section in the author's article "A Female Rabbi Is Like an Orange on the Passover Plate—Women and the Rabbinate: Challenges and Horizons" (in *Rabbi - Pastor - Priest: Their Roles and Profiles Through the Ages*, Studia Judaica Book 64, ed. by Walter Homolka and Heinz-Gunther Schotler, [Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2013], 219–40).

1. There are a few salient examples of women who served as leaders in ancient Israel (such as the prophetesses Deborah and Huldah), in the Middle Ages (such as

Asenath Barzani, 1590–1670, in Iraq), and in the Chasidic communities of Eastern Europe from the eighteenth century onwards (such as Edel, daughter of the founder of Chasidism, the Baal Shem Tov); see Renee Goldberg, “Hasidic Women Rebbes from 1749–1933” (rabbinical thesis, HUC-JIR, 1997). See also p. 23, this volume.

2. Pamela Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women’s Ordination 1889–1985* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 1–29. Regarding women in the rabbinate, see Laura Geller, “From Equality to Transformation: The Challenge of Women Rabbinic Leadership,” in *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition*, ed. T. M. Rudavsky (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), 234–54; Jacqueline Koch Ellenson, “From the Personal to the Communal,” in *New Jewish Feminism*, ed. Elyse Goldstein (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2009), 125–32; Janet Marder, “How Women Are Changing the Rabbinate,” *Reform Judaism* 19, no. 4 (1991): 4–9; Irit Printz, “Women in the Conservative Synagogue,” in *New Jewish Feminism*, 186–94.

3. Until recently, Jonas was almost forgotten, but after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of East Germany’s archives, a comprehensive biography on her was written; see Elisa Klapheck, *Fräulein Rabbiner Jonas: The Story of the First Woman Rabbi*, trans. Toby Axelrod (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); Elisa Klapheck, ed., *Fräulein Rabbiner Jonas: Kann die Frau das Rabbinische Amt Bekleiden?* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 1999).

4. Sandy Eisenberg Sasso was the first woman to be ordained, in 1974, as a rabbi in the Reconstructionist Movement. A year later, in 1975, the first woman rabbi was ordained in Leo Baeck College in London. It took more than a decade and a fierce debate that threatened to split the Conservative Movement before the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York ordained Amy Eilberg, the first Conservative woman rabbi, in 1985.

5. See Sara Hurwitz, “Orthodox Women in Rabbinic Roles,” in *New Jewish Feminism*, 133–43; Haviva Ner-David, *Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey toward Traditional Rabbinic Ordination* (Needham, MA: JFL Books, 2000).

6. My favorite answer is that of Naamah Kelman, who replied to this question, saying that her husband is “*rav seren*” (a military degree). The Women’s Rabbinic Network often quotes a well-known answer as “lucky.”

7. The numbers include both part-time and full-time rabbis, as well as some rabbinical students. I thank Rabbi Chen Ben Or-Tsfoni for the information.

8. I thank the Placement Office of the CCAR, for this information (retrieved on January 6, 2015).

9. I thank Rabbi Andrew Sacks and Ms. Rakefet Ginsburg for the information.

10. For information on women rabbis in North America, see note 2.

11. I thank Alona Lisitsa for providing me with her address to the WRN conference.

12. Some of the women prefer to be called *rav*. These two titles (*rav* and *rabbah*) often appear one next to the other, and we need to explain that the different titles are a matter of preference and that there is no difference in terms of its content. With regard to the choice of the title *rabbah*, see Elana Maryles Sztokman, “What’s in a Name? Choosing ‘Rabba’ over ‘Rav’ and Why,” *Forward*, May 2, 2011 (<http://forward.com/articles/137448/#ixzz1XLi1OVgp>); Zvia Walden, “*Rav, Rabbit, Rabbat, Rabbah* and *Ravrava*,” *Panim* 33 (2005): 77–84 [in Hebrew].

13. See http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/sheelot_teshuvot/MivharTeshuvot/Pages/25031003.aspx.

14. It is useful to note the well-known truth that having a half-time job means being paid half of a full salary but does not necessarily mean working half-time.

15. See Jacqueline Koch Ellenson, "From the Personal to the Communal," in *New Jewish Feminism*, 125–33; Janet Marder, "How Women Are Changing the Rabbinate," *Reform Judaism* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 5.

16. Yalta was the wise wife of the third- to fourth-century Talmudic sage Rav Nachman; she used to teach the rabbis while sitting behind a veil (BT *Beitzah* 25b).

17. In English-speaking countries, the title "rabbi" is used alike for men and women; therefore the entire question of the appropriate title for a woman rabbi relates primarily to the Israeli situation—and to the title to use on ordination certificates even in America. To this very day it has not yet been decided whether to write *morateinu harav* or *morateinu harabbah*. And in Germany another version of this problem is whether to use the term *Frau Rabbiner* or *Rabbinerin*.

18. Zvia Walden, "Rav, Rabbit, Rabbat, Rabbah and Rávrava," *Panim* 33 (2005): 77–84.

19. Ibid

20. Yitzhak Tsedaka, "Feminine and Masculine Numbering, a Handsome Man or a Gorgeous Lady, or Male and Female Created He Them," *Leshoneinu Le'am* 45, no. 1 (1994): 31–32.

21. This suggestion was made by Professor Moshe Bar-Asher, and see above, note 2.

22. The title granted to Sara Hurwitz in the United States, and see above.

23. Sophiah Hirshfeld, "What to Call a Woman Rabbi of a Congregation, an Interview with Rachel Keren," *Kolech*, July 23, 2009. Other names that were proposed in that contest were *rabbanit*, *talmidat chachamim*, and *musmechet* (<http://www.kolech.org.il/show.asp?id=33820>).

24. Rabbi Mira Raz, who, as noted, was the first ordained rabbi to have *rabbah* written on her *s'michah* certificate, wrote the following: "I believe that just as the world was created with an utterance word—with ten utterances—so it is that words create worlds. A word creates a consciousness and the words create a new world of consciousness. If I say about a woman that she is a *rav*, then the woman becomes an exception. There are many rabbis, and she is different, a woman rabbi" (Walden, above, note 2).

25. One of my colleagues often jokes at her own expense and says that if they call her *HaRabbah* X it will look in Hebrew orthography as if she were saying "Much X," especially out of her tendency to be slightly overweight. This joke brings us back to what we have been discussing above, that is to say, the increasing self-consciousness among professional women, and especially among women rabbis, both intrinsically and in terms of their physical appearance.

26. See "Rabbanit, Chazanit" (a response from the scientific secretariat), *Leshoneinu Le'am* 37, no. 1 (1986): 26–27.

27. The spokesperson told me of the angry letters received by the Academy regarding the question of the proper Hebrew pronunciation of "the Palestinian people" (the *shin* versus the *sin*), because it is a subject whose implications involve whether or not to give formal recognition to the Palestinian people.

28. “*Rav* in the Feminine Form” [in Hebrew], the Academy for the Hebrew Language’s website (http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/sheelot_teshuvot/MivharTeshuvot/Pages/25031003.aspx).

Note: The final section of this essay was translated by Rabbi William Cutter, PhD.