



Barriers to Belief: Men & Women

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Dedicated in memory of
Avraham Aharon ben Moshe z"l,
Ira Genesove z"l
Father of Dr. Leon Genesove
whose Yahrzeit is tonight,
15th of Tammuz

Dedicated in memory of my Zaidie,
Dr. M. Herbert Danzger z"l
מרדכי צבי בן פנחס וחיה ז"ל
and based on his book
"Returning to Tradition"

Tonight's Mechitzas

- THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN JUDAISM
- Based on Problems in Orthodox Beliefs (Returning to Tradition p[290-297](#))
- What differing roles bother people?
- What responses can be given?
- Shelo Asani
- Time bound mitzvot

Restrictive Rules and Roles

Returning to Tradition p290

DISCLAIMER – below (published 1989) may not still apply for interdenominational opinions, especially in Canada.

- The question of the role and status of women in Orthodox Judaism recurs most powerfully and persistently in recruitment efforts.
- It is directed only at Orthodoxy, as Reform and Conservative Judaism long ago agreed that the Orthodox position was demeaning to women and have modified the ritual and liturgy and redefined the position of women.
- Reform Judaism, with its futuristic perspective, argues that in the past Judaism had primitive notions but has now rid itself of them.
- Conservative Judaism, which places greater weight on respect for tradition, has had more difficulty with this position but has followed Reform's lead.
- Orthodoxy's view of the eternal truth of halakhah has forced it to defend a number of practices rejected by the other branches of Judaism: the mechitzah, the exclusion of women from being counted in the minyan, the refusal to permit women the honor of reading from the Torah in public prayer, the refusal to allow women to become rabbis, the recitation of morning blessings by every Orthodox male thanking God for "not having created me a woman," the laws of Niddah, which separate husband and wife during a period of each menstrual cycle.
- None of these is a problem for Conservative or Reform Judaism (with the exception, at the time of this study, of the ordination of women in the Conservative movement).

Restrictive Rules

- Mechitza
- Counting towards Minyan
- Aliyot to the Torah
- Women Rabbis
- Shelo Asani Goy, Shelo Asani Isha
- Laws of Niddah
- Time bound Mitzvot
- Public roles – Srara
- Women learning Torah
- Women belong in the Kitchen
- Tzniut is for women like Torah is for men

Why do these issues bother us (p293) from last week

- ‘Rabbi Mendel Weinbach of Ohr Somayach feels that these laws are particularly difficult for ba'alei t'shuva to accept. "These are people with a highly developed sense of ethics and morality. These questions really bother them.”’
- They are not problems for Reform Jews, who can simply say that they are the primitive conceptions of morality of an earlier age. Conservatives attempt to explain these laws in terms of the prevailing social and economic conditions at the time they were laid down. But for the Orthodox, to whom the laws are eternal and unchanging, they present a problem.
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Dividing the issues

- Sociological constructs
 - Differ based on community
 - Can be relatively easily changed or explained
 - Not inherent to Judaism
 - Often practical or historical considerations
 - Source of the issue is communal
- Halachic Challenges
 - Also may differ based on community
 - Require serious effort in addressing and resolving
 - Have G-d and Tradition as the problem

Problem from Sociological constructs (RtT p293)

- The place of women is not much studied in yeshivot for men, although the rules that give rise to the problem are studied, the morning blessing is pronounced and a mechitzah is in place in every sanctuary (except at Pardess).
- It is, however, very much an issue in women's schools, particularly in outreach efforts such as the Jewish Learning Exchange and the Lincoln Square Synagogue. The following conversation between a woman at Har Zion Yeshiva and another who had been placed with an Orthodox family for Shabbat was overheard on a Saturday night in 1976:
 - Woman 1: Judaism puts women up on a pedestal.
 - Woman 2: Some pedestal. It all sounds fine, Shabbat and family and togetherness. But while he was sitting there at the table like a king, she was running in and out like a good little servant.
 - Woman 1: Give it another chance. You don't understand it.
 - Woman2: I've seen enough. If this is Judaism, it's not for me.

Issues fade away – Mechitzas

- Mechitza Wars in United States in the mid-20th century
- “At Lincoln Square Synagogue Rabbi Buchwald reported that in the necessary to discuss the early 1970’s, in response to persistent questions from women, he found it necessary to discuss the meaning and importance of the mechitzah in the synagogue about once a month.”
- “By 1980 the issue seemed to have faded—women seemed to be aware of the mechitzah and to take their seats on the women's side without fuss or the need for directions—but the reason for the change was not apparent.”

Negative Language in Prayer

- Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, Who did not make me a gentile.
- Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, Who did not make me a slave.
- Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, Who did not make me a woman.
- A woman says: Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, Who made me according to His will. (Mestuda 1981 Siddur Translation)

• בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ-הוֹ-ה אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁלֹא עָשָׂנִי גּוֹי:

• בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ-הוֹ-ה אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁלֹא עָשָׂנִי עֶבֶד:

• בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ-הוֹ-ה אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁלֹא עָשָׂנִי אִשָּׁה:

• נְשִׁים אוֹמְרוֹת: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ-הוֹ-ה אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂנִי כְרִצּוֹנוּ:

Simplest reason

- Who did not make me a woman...."A woman" because women are not obligated in [as many] mitzvot...
(Tosefta Berachot 6:18)
- A non-Jew, as it is said, "all non-Jews are like nothing before Him, like nought and vanity are they counted to Him" (cf. Yeshayahu 40:17). A boor, for a boor [out of ignorance] does not fear sin. **(Tosefta Berachot 6:18)**
- Blessed [is He] who did not make me a woman, for a woman is not commanded in [all] the mitzvot.
(Yerushalmi Berachot 9:1:)
- Translations from Deracheha

• תוספתא ברכות ו:יח ברוך שלא עשאני
אשה...אשה שאין הנשים חייבות
במצות...

• תוספתא ברכות ו:יח גוי שנ' כל הגוים כאין
נגדו כאפס ותהי נחשבו לו [על פי ישעיהו
מ:יז] בור שאין בור ירא חטא

• תלמוד ירושלמי ברכות פרק ט הלכה
ברוך שלא עשאני אשה שאין האשה
מצווה על המצות

Examples of an answer and its aftermath (RtT)

- The issue was still a live one at the Jewish Learning Exchange program in December 1982, when Rabbi David Gottlieb of Ohr Someyach was closely questioned by several participants at a three day seminar. The men's morning blessing was particularly troubling. Other teachers responded, but their answers did not seem satisfying, and the seminar participants continued to press the matter. Gottlieb suggested that to follow the change introduced in the Conservative service instead of thanking God for "not having created me a woman," the new blessing seeks to avoid invidious comparison and thanks God for having created me a man") would mean putting one's own existence in the forefront.

- In the context of a talmudic discussion on the meaning of life, the academies of Hillel and Shamai agreed after a two-and-a-half-year debate that "It were better to offer thanks for what existence one has not been made to suffer than to offer thanks for one's existence when one addresses The Cause and Master of All Existence."

- This is a fine philosophical point that apparently went above the heads of many listeners.

- One of the most enthusiastic participants, a young woman whose statement approving the Jewish Learning Exchange program ("I have learned more in these last three days than in all my years in Hebrew School") was later used in a mailing advertising an upcoming seminar was interviewed a year later and said:

- A. I learned a lot at that seminar.

- Q. What did you learn?

- A. For one thing the meaning of the blessing that men say that I'm glad I'm not a woman or a dog. I mean, women have their own status.

- This woman did not become Orthodox or adopt any Orthodox practices

- No blessing compares men or women with dogs; nor was the comment intended ironically. The response indicates that she misunderstood the men's blessing and that her satisfaction with the response to questions about the blessing had nothing to do with its content but rather concerned its context—an articulate spokesman said something that appeared to be intelligent.

- The most radically countercultural response was offered by Rabbi Krupnick, Dean of Brovender's Shappel for Women, a modernistic school:
 - Judaism doesn't believe that all people are the same. Sure, they are all equal in the sense that they are all creatures of God, all made in His image, all having a soul, all descended from the same human line. But women and men are not the same. Men have one role, and women have another. And if you deny that, you might just as well deny that the Torah distinguishes the Cohen and Levi and the Israelite or that the Jews are uniquely God's chosen people. All are born into their roles; they don't compete for them.
 - Again the key seems to be not so much that the answers are satisfactory as that they were made in an intelligent way by an articulate spokesman with the proper credentials—that is, advanced secular education.
- But the place of women involves not only beliefs but also action and rituals. As I have discussed previously, the laws regarding relations between men and women are much more problematic in recruitment than are the beliefs.

Shelo Asani – That G-d didn't make me a...

- Historical place
- “It has been argued that the three blessings of the morning prayers, which thank God for not having created one a Gentile, a slave, or a woman, were added to the original list of morning blessings specifically to reject Paul's formulation (Gal. 3:28): **“There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women: you are all one in union with Jesus Christ.”**(Heineman 1977; compare BT, Berachot 20b with BT, Menachot 43b). My thanks to Norman Fredman for calling this to my attention.”
- Plutarch reports that Plato, before his death, thanked the Fates that he had been **born a human being rather than an animal, Greek rather than barbarian, and that he lived in the time of Socrates.** (Professor Yosef Tabory [“The Benedictions of Self-Identity and The Changing Status of Women and of Orthodoxy”](#))
- Thales, who lived some hundred years earlier. Whoever it was, he was reputed to have said that “there were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: **‘first, that I was born a human being and not one of the brutes; next that I was born a man and not a woman; thirdly a Greek and not a Barbarian’**”. In the vein of tradition history, we might assume that the ancients connected with either Thales or Socrates a trifold thanksgiving which was reworked by Plato. (Tabory)

Who gets to go to Shul?

- Family with children aged 6 month, and one 3 years old. Someone needs to stay home with the kids. Who gets to go to Shul?
- Friday night?
- Shabbat Day?
- Option of Plag and zman mincha/maariv as is the case in many communities in the summer
- Childcare during services
- Shabbat Morning – 7:30 minyan versus 9am minyan

Halachic

- Time Bound Mitzvot מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא
- Men have Brit Milah, women don't
- Pidyon HaBen
- Leading services
- Aliyot

Time bound Mitzvoth מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא

- Actually only 7 out of the 613 Torah-level mitzvot,
- 1) reciting Shema, 2) tzitzit, 3) tefillin 4) Shofar, 5) Lulav, 6) Sukka, and 7) counting the omer.
- Women can still do them (minus Tephilin and Tallit for Ashkenazim)
- Main debate is whether with a bracha (Ashkenaz) or not (Edot Mizrach)

Kabbalistic Conundrum – from last week

- “The most problematic answers in terms of universalistic values are offered by those whose theory of souls suggests that some have holier souls or are derived from higher Divine sparks than others.” (from Jews & Gentiles)
- Similar sentiments are expressed that women have different obligations and mitzvot than men because they are on a higher level and don't need all of the mitzvot to be holy
- Women's responses vary:
 - Satisfied
 - You got that right
 - Offended
 - I'm holier, so you can be mean to me?
 - Ehhhh, Even if true, woefully insufficient
 - Doesn't make sense

Why exempt?

- Women are exempt from laying *tefillin*, and that is a paradigm for other positive time-bound *mitzvot*. (Kiddushin 35a)
 - Conceptually, exemption may simply be a decree of Divine will.

Other conceptual rationales?

- Rav S. R. Hirsch suggests that women have an enthusiasm for serving God that makes these specific *mitzvot* unnecessary.
- According to Abudarham, a woman's strict adherence to positive time-bound commandments may create a tension between her obligations to her husband and to God.
- The Lubavitcher Rebbe suggests that a woman fulfills these *mitzvot* through her husband.
- Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that the exemption protects women's ability to raise children. Still, Halacha allows for each woman to choose for herself to what extent her life is centered on domestic activity and how to use the flexibility the exemption affords. (from [Deracheha](#) on time bound mitzvot)

Minyan

- Source for minyan is a drasha: עדה עדה from the 10 wicked spies, so women excluded from counting towards 10 of minyan of Davar shebekudusha
- BUT for Kiddush HaShem and Purim – ten people include women

Kiddush Friday night vs HaMotzi

Additional Resources - Deracheha

- [Status I: Halachic Status](#)
- Are men and women equal? Was gender hierarchy built into Creation?
- [Status II: Halachic Status](#)
- In what types of cases are men's and women's obligations the same?
- [Positive Time-Bound Mitzvot](#)
- Why are women exempt from positive time-bound *mitzvot*? Is this a matter of identity?
- [Voluntary Mitzva Performance](#)
- Is performing a mitzva voluntarily permissible? How is it meaningful?
- [Beracha on Voluntary Performance](#)
- May a woman recite a *beracha* over voluntary mitzva performance?

Breaking the Fourth Wall

- Why it bothers us?
- What elements/mitzvot?
- Differentiate between sociology and Halacha
- Shelo Asani...
- Mitzvot essay shezman grammar
- Answers women balk at
 - Women are 'better' so we are mean to them
 - Women deserve to live in the kitchen
- כל כבודו בת מלך פנימה – women's honor is in the home, therefore she can't/shouldn't leave her home or be involved publicly.
- Workable Answers
 - Different roles, but equally valued
 - Different edot and shitot
 - A lot is sociological
 - Many Mitzvot only for one group anyways

Barriers to Belief

with Rabbi Chaim Metzger

Wednesday Nights @8:15 pm



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When Values Collide

July 6: Jews & Non-Jews

July 13: Men & Women

July 20: Language Barrier



BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV

DAY OF GIVING

JULY 13-14



Dedicated in memory of my Zaidie,
Dr. M. Herbert Danzger z"l
and based on his book
"Returning to Tradition"



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