

M A ' Y A N מעין

The Jewish Women's Project
a program of the JCC
on the Upper West Side

J O U R N E Y

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Ma'yan acts as a catalyst for change in the Jewish community in order to create an environment more inclusive of and responsive to women, their needs and their experiences. Ma'yan facilitates this transformation by training and supporting advocates for change and developing and disseminating innovative educational programs.

IN THIS ISSUE

beyond the Maccabees

Chanukkah heroines	4
a Jew with the mind of a Greek	7
new ritual: Kislev	10

sharing the light

changemaker profile: Gila Gevirtz	12
my tzedakah comes and goes	14
sharing our gifts	17
confronting money's power	19
books to read, books to give	22

upcoming programs

Ma'yan Programs	26
at the JCC	29
community programs	30
Ma'yan registration form	32

M A ' Y A N J O U R N E Y

In this issue of *Journey*, Ma'yan turns its focus to the holiday of Chanukkah. According to tradition women are obligated to light Chanukkah candles because of the involvement of women in the miracle of the holiday (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 23a). What did women do? I promise, it has nothing to do with peeling potatoes. In these pages you can read about the women of the Chanukkah story and about a woman from the 19th century who prevailed through her own Maccabee/Hellenist struggle in New York City.

Because of the persistent tradition of gift giving on Chanukkah, this *Journey* focuses heavily on Jewish women and *gelt* (money). We feel that Chanukkah is a very appropriate time to extend *Journey's* discussion of women and money. We have included some issues new to these pages: young women questioning money's power and even younger women and how they can be taught about money and *tzedakah*. We've also included a list of new feminist books that would make great gifts for individuals and community libraries.

So what does the obligation to light the Chanukkah candles involve? Beyond the personal literal obligation of lighting candles, we invite you to hear with us Chanukkah's call to share with others — light, warmth and a sense of being blessed by daily miracles.

Tamara Cohen
Editor



Emma Lazarus





beyond the Maccabees

CHANUKKAH HEROINES

In my day school Chanukkah play, I was the *dredyl*. The costume was made of a painted refrigerator box, and I had to spin around a lot. It was a good part for a girl. In fact I can't remember any other good girl parts. Everyone knew that Chanukkah was the story of the Maccabees and the Maccabees with their shiny aluminum foil swords and shields were all boys' parts.

It's true there was Chana. She was the mother of seven sons who were tortured and killed, one after another, choosing to die rather than eat pork or bow down to an idol. During all of this Chana watched. According to one version, the mother then leaped over a balcony to her death. In the air she was greeted by a Divine voice that proclaimed, "Happy is the mother of sons."¹ Whether this was intended as a cruel satirical joke or a level of faith beyond my comprehension, it was not a story I was deeply drawn to. Other versions of this story, versions I was never taught, end with her going insane, perhaps a more understandable response to such a horrid experience.² But I'm not sure that this ultimate martyr would have ever made it into my school Chanukkah play. Even if she had, who would have wanted to play Chana? The heroism of the Maccabees, militaristic as it was, was easier to aspire to than this ultimate martyred Jewish mother.

But, to return to my search for better girls' parts in Chanukkah plays, I want to examine briefly two compelling sources of characters — the tales of a courageous Hasmonean bride and the apocryphal story of Judith.

The following story has several versions, each one a little different.³ A particularly heinous law of the Syrian-Greek officials ruling Palestine in 168 BCE required that Jewish brides be "given" to local Syrian-Greek officials before or on their wedding nights. This practice of institutionalized political rape seems to have gone on for about three years until a Hasmonean bride, sometimes identified as the daughter of the High Priest or the sister of the Maccabee brothers, rebelled.

In front of her entire wedding party, this brave young woman tore off her head covering and her dress and stood defiantly naked. When her brothers moved to kill her on the spot for dishonoring the family with this act, the woman declared, "I stand before you naked but without sin and you wish to kill me. Yet without protest you would have me thus revealed by the Greek general!" The tale of the woman ends here. After this moment of very clever, risky and incredibly brave activism her brothers take over the story. Moved to action, they go out and kill the general. The drama of this scene clearly lends itself to a whole new level of Chanukkah play, but I can hear the protests already — too disturbing, too sexual, too adult a story for a Chanukkah play. How interesting that the violence of the Maccabees was

never too adult, but the resistance to political sexual violence is too mature of a story to tell.

The second character I would have loved to play on stage is Judith. Judith's story is told in the book of Judith which is found in the Apocrypha, the group of texts (not included in the Hebrew Bible) in which the Book of the Maccabees is found. Having known about Judith as an adolescent would have given me my own Joan of Arc — a powerful, independent and pious Jewish woman who went into battle to save her people. And Judith doesn't even end up dead. It is true that she doesn't wear armor either which is probably another reason I never found out much about her. Judith's armor is her intelligence and her sexuality — again, more complicated a story than the mother willing to die. Judith is not a mother, no longer a wife and she is willing to kill, not willing to die.

Many people have heard something about Judith, perhaps because the custom of eating cheese products on Chanukkah is traced to her. While oil is certainly the main ingredient of Chanukkah cooking, cheese is also eaten because of an old tradition of honoring the actions of a brave woman, Judith, who killed an enemy general, Holofernes. She served him salty cheese and wine until he passed out, at which point she chopped off his head.

While the Book of Judith does not actually describe an event that fits historically into the Maccabean revolt, it has been associated with the story of the Maccabees for a very long time. Some contemporary scholars suggest that it might have been written during the Hasmonean revolt. Since the name Judith means "a Jewish woman" and the story does not necessarily present itself as a true historical account, it lends itself to be read as an allegory. In this reading, Jews are represented in the figure of a powerful and independent young widow who uses her intellect and beauty to decapitate (or castrate) the enemy.

What is so compelling about Judith of the Apocryphal book is that she does so much more than just cut off the head of the enemy. She delivers long speeches to the incompetent male Jewish leadership of her era, urging them to wake up and respond to the situation at hand. She prays eloquently, reminding God that "Thy power standeth not in a multitude, nor Thy might in strong men." Judith's God is a "God of the afflicted," a God who will deliver the enemy "by the hand of a woman." (*Judith*, 9:10-11) After she skillfully schemes to save her people while safeguarding herself and her religious practice, Judith returns to her

people and frees them from the terrible siege of their enemies. She is presented with the tent and belongings of Holofernes which she dedicates to God at the Temple in Jerusalem. Judith leads all the women of Israel in song and dance. Before her death she frees her maid and divides her property among her own relatives and the relatives of her late husband, Menasseh. After she dies, she is mourned by “the house of Israel” for seven days. The book ends with a sentence reminiscent of the end of the Prophet Deborah’s story: “No one could terrify the Israelites in Judith’s days, nor for a long time after she died.” (*Judith*, 16:25)

Whether or not you ever wanted to be a heroine in a Chanukkah play, the stories of these Chanukkah heroines have relevance to our lives. According to the Talmud, it is customary for women to abstain from working during the burning of the Chanukkah candles — our reward for the actions of these women who helped in the miracle of Chanukkah. In some traditional and/or Sephardic communities women don’t work at all on either the first or last day of Chanukkah or even on all eight. So take a rest. And, if you are lighting candles using the traditional blessings, when you get to the second blessing which praises God for miracles done for our fathers “in those days, at this time,” add the word *imoteinu* (our mothers) after *avoteinu* (our fathers), because women’s roles in Chanukkah belong in the liturgy as well as on the stage.

— Tamara Cohen

1. Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 57b.

2. Lamentations Rabbah 1:50.

3. See “Kislev” in Judith Solomon, *The Rosh Chodesh Table*, Biblio Press, 1996.

A JEW WITH THE MIND OF A GREEK

Discovering Emma Lazarus

"Clash, Israel, the cymbals, touch the lyre,
Sound the brass trumpet and the harsh-tongued horn,
Chant hymns of victory till the heart take fire
The Maccabean spirit leap new-born!"
Emma Lazarus, "The Feast of Lights" ¹



Jewish identity, both in the ancient and modern worlds, has probably always been more complex than the choice between being a Hellenist or a Maccabee.

Emma Lazarus, poet, author, and activist (and one of the 1999 Women of Valor) grappled with this reality in a 19th century American context. While she clearly was inspired by the Maccabees as her many Jewish-themed poems and essays testify, she was also drawn to the Hellenistic society of her day, 19th century American high culture. An unaffiliated but ultimately active Jew, Lazarus' Jewish identity developed through her writing and her work with Russian Jewish immigrants. In her brief life (she died of cancer at 38), her writing reflected many of the questions engendered by a hyphenated Jewish identity.

When I began researching Emma Lazarus' life, I must admit that I wasn't very excited. I'm not a poetry or literature person, I had never read her famous poem which graces the base of the Statue of Liberty, and as a slightly cynical Canadian in New York, I couldn't relate to her embrace of American ideals and culture. Expecting to wade through flowery 19th century poetry, I discovered a modern Jewish single career woman facing contemporary Jewish problems. An assimilated Jew, Lazarus felt threatened by incidents of anti-Semitism. In later years she struggled to embrace Judaism in a Christian world not ready to fully accept Jews and in a Jewish community suspicious of "too much" Judaism. On the periphery of two cultures, American and Jewish, Lazarus reflects the views and issues of both *the Hellenists and the Maccabees of the ancient world*.

Born 150 years ago, Emma Lazarus was the fourth daughter in a Sephardic and Ashkenazic family with roots in America since Colonial times. Her first book of poetry was published when she was 17. A short time later, she began a correspondence with the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson who became her mentor. A prolific author of poetry, prose and fiction, Lazarus

contributed to both Jewish and American publications on topics ranging from "Emerson's Personality" to "The Jewish Problem." An ardent literary defender of Jews, Lazarus is part of a tradition of 19th century American Jewish women writers who used their talents to produce passionate defenses of Jews and Judaism.¹ In her poetry and prose, she challenged her non-Jewish readers to reject the embedded anti-Semitism of the surrounding Christian society. She called on her Jewish audience to remember their recent history of persecution and help their fellow Jews, victims of deadly pogroms in Russia.

An eager participant in the cultural life of 1880s' Manhattan, Lazarus was at first more Hellenist than Maccabee, probably more comfortable in the concert hall than the synagogue. Still distant from her Jewish identity in 1877 when she agreed to translate three Hebrew poems for a new hymn collection for Temple Emanu-El in New York, she acknowledged her ambivalence about her Judaism in a letter she wrote to the Temple's Rabbi Gustav Gottheil: "... [M]y interest and sympathies were loyal to our race, although my religious convictions (if such they can be called) and the circumstances of my life have led me somewhat apart from our people."²

Lazarus' admiration of Heinrich Heine, the Jewish-born German poet who converted to Christianity, reveals her desire to merge her two worlds, that of Judaism and high culture. A "Jew with the mind of a Greek," to Lazarus, Heine represented the dichotomy between two antithetical cultural types. She also juxtaposed Greek imagery with Jewish figures in her famous poem, "The New Colossus." Rejecting the "brazen giant of Greek fame," Lazarus chose the "Mother of Exiles," a Jewish image, to welcome America's "huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

For Lazarus, the Maccabean struggle of her day was the fight against anti-Semitism and the absorption of Russian Jewish immigrants. Her writing as a battle cry, Lazarus believed that the power of Jewish history would rouse her fellow Jews to action. Having become a more knowledgeable Jew, she wanted to "bring before the Jewish public such facts and critical observation...calculated to arouse a more loyal spirit and a more intelligent estimate of the duties of the hour."³ Perhaps she saw herself as taking up the call of the "Maccabean spirit."

To me, Lazarus exemplifies the challenges of maintaining a Jewish identity in a too-accepting non-Jewish world. As a modern Jewish woman who struggles to balance Judaism, feminism, and cultural awareness, I look to Lazarus' legacy of Jewish-American literary activism and I take heart. Maybe (to paraphrase Moses Mendelssohn) there is a way to be a Jewish woman at home and in the street, equally comfortable with Torah, Emerson, and Plaskow. As we light Chanukkah candles, may we be enlightened by Emma Lazarus' example as we recognize the intricacies of Jewish history and Jewish identity.

— Susan Sapiro

Sonnets.

6

I.

The New Colossus.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
 With conquering limbs astride from land to land,
 Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
 A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
 Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
 Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
 Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
 The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
 With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

1863.

(Written in aid of Bartholdi's Pedestal Fund.)

1. Diane Lichtenstein, "The Words and Worlds of Emma Lazarus," *Writing Their Nations: The Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Women Writers*. Indiana University Press, 1992.
2. Morris U. Schappes, ed. *Letters of Emma Lazarus*. New York Public Library, 1949, p. 21.
3. Emma Lazarus, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, Jewish Historical Society of New York, 1987, p. 8.

NEW RITUAL

Use this reading before or after you light the candles on one of the nights of Chanukkah. Have all present share the names of women who fit into the description of the poem. Tell the story of Judith, Emma Lazarus or the Hasmonean bride (see previous articles.)

Kislev by Sorel Loeb Goldberg (excerpt)

Darkest month.
Brief days, frosty nights
illuminated by the warm glow of candles,
the lights of Chanukah which pierce the darkness
and raise our hearts in pride.
A season to celebrate heroes,
the triumph of hope over despair,
the holy over the mundane,
and the rededication of the spirit.

Not the Macabees alone will we recall on these days of glory,
But the women of our people who themselves illuminated lives,
pierced barriers,
and raised the banner of our people.
Their voices shout softly to us across the ages,
Their words mere echoes,
their dances mere shadows among the tales we tell.

Can we be still enough to hear their melodies?
Can we seek deep enough to learn their refrain?

As the smallest flame kindled in the gloom
Can brighten dismal corners,
So the recollection of our mothers
May spark our waking dreams.

As we warm ourselves
in the flickering glow of the Chanukah lights,
Let us dedicate ourselves to reclaiming their stories
and linking them to our own.
Let us light these flames to honor their names,
As we bless ourselves by their memory.

As we greet the chill and dark winter,
We light eight candles to recall our mothers and teachers.
Can we be still enough to hear their melodies?
Can we seek deep enough to learn their refrain?



sharing the light

CHANGEMAKER PROFILE

Gila Gevirtz



Gila Gevirtz, an accomplished artist, teacher and writer, is currently the Executive Editor of Behrman House Inc. She lectures and leads workshops on biblical texts and spirituality and is the recipient of a fellowship from the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life Coolidge Colloquium. Her prints and collages, which weave verbal and visual elements together to create *midrash*, have been widely exhibited.

At a time when conventional wisdom taught that the personal is political, my mother taught me that — at its best — the personal is spiritual. It was 1969. I was twenty-two and worked at the New York State Employment Service. One of my clients, Lily, was a post-war immigrant from Poland and, I assumed, Jewish. In her seventies, Lily was a hotel chambermaid who spoke little English and couldn't keep a job. The reasons for her dismissal varied — she was too frail, too temperamental, too troubled, too sloppy, too slow, too arrogant — but the result was always the same, come Monday morning, Lily would be back at my desk.

Each time, I not only tried to help Lily find a job, I also took twenty dollars from my wallet to help tide her over. However, after several months I realized that Lily needed more than I could provide and I urged her to seek help from Jewish organizations that serve Holocaust survivors. “But I'm Christian,” she said.

I cringed, thinking that I might have been helping a Nazi collaborator. When I told my mother what had happened, her response was short and to the point: It is not your job to imagine — for good or for evil — what a stranger has done. It is your obligation to help someone whose need has touched your soul.

And so my mother taught me the spiritual nature of *tzedakah* — a soul having been touched, must move to action. Fortunately, I have been surrounded and inspired by vibrant women who share this same understanding. One of them is my aunt Ella, a retired yeshiva teacher living in Co-op City in The Bronx. Aunt Ella's hallways, living room, and bedroom are crowded with family photos and memorabilia, but her kitchen is her place of business. There, her table overflows with hundreds of coupons diligently clipped from a variety of newspapers and magazines, and her closets house a generous stash of *pushkes* — jars chock full of pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters.

Over time, the *pushkes* are filled and the money is sent to various charitable organizations that help the orphaned, the infirm, and the hungry.

The coupons are part of a labor-intensive, time-sensitive operation. My aunt regularly weeds through them to make sure they do not expire and then organizes them into packets that she sends to former students in need.

My aunt Ella, like my grandmother Rifkah before her, has always used her resources not only for her family but also to help the community. The same is true of my friend Susan Beecher, a potter, who invited me to exhibit my art with hers and to donate a portion of the proceeds to a center for the prevention of domestic violence. And the same is true of my cousin Claire Drucker James, who, touched by a documentary of the substandard condition of Roumanian orphanages, founded Orphan Reach, a not-for-profit organization that raises money for the Bucegi Orphanage.

The personal finances of these women differ; however, each gives with the conviction that what she does makes a difference. Each has been touched by injustice and has made righting it a priority. And each targets her money as if it were a vote.

Like these women, I vote with my money. When I give to organizations that work to prevent domestic violence and to help its victims, I am voting for the rights of women and children. When I donate to Jewish institutions for the arts, I am voting for a thriving Jewish culture. And when I contribute to centers of Jewish women's learning — whether in Israel, the United States, India, or the former Soviet Union — I am voting for the just and creative transformation of the Jewish community.

I have also discovered that I can extend my "giving power" by educating others. For example, when a group of friends helped me negotiate a business deal, I made a donation to a woman's organization not only to honor my friends but also to make them aware of that organization's work. Informing potential donors about institutions or individuals who are doing important work in the community is vital for their growth.

Finally, I believe that our ability to respond generously to others is intimately connected to our ability to give generously to ourselves. Indeed, Judaism encourages us to take pleasure in life's bounty. For example, religious significance is given to delighting in new clothes and in the new fruits of each season, as well as in enhancing holiday observance with tasty foods and beautiful ritual objects. Even our most sacred text — the Torah — which calls upon us to respond to the need and injustice in the world, opens with a description of all the goodness that was created for our enjoyment.

There is no question about it. Rich or poor or any place in between, Jewish tradition requires us to find the bounty in our lives. Praise God for it. Enjoy it fully. And share it with others.

Thus, while none of us has all the resources necessary to transform the world, each of us has some of the resources. Together, let us set the agenda for a more just future. Let us give from the vantage of abundance with the guiding passion of our souls.

MY TZEDAKAH COMES AND GOES

Teaching Children About Having and Giving

by Diane P. Burhenne

Like so many of my generation, I grew up with a little light blue and white tin box sitting on the kitchen counter. Periodically, though not often, I witnessed coins being dropped into the top slot. I remember the sound of the coins when I shook the box and a vague image of the newly created State of Israel and the Israeli flag in white stencil on the side.

Somehow the box managed to fill up and get empty again. The box was called a *pushke*, and at various times, grownups in my family talked about how they were going to "put money in the *pushke*." For many years, the purpose of this perplexing ritual remained a mystery to me.

At some point, later in my childhood, I learned that the contents of the *pushke* were sent to Israel; people there, especially children, needed the money and we were helping them. I understood that the money in the *pushke* was not to be touched; it was never to be removed for any purpose other than its stated one.

In this way, *zedakah* was presented to me in its most rudimentary form. There was no notion of *tikkun olam* in my Eastern European family struggling in the New World, only a sense that we needed to help people in Israel.

None of my pennies went into the *pushke*. I understood that my family was doing something "good and necessary," but it was not something that impacted me in a substantive way. I was not taught about *zedakah* in a way that helped me, as a young adult, make informed decisions about my own money and "giving."

This non-lesson-lesson of the *pushke* is probably one of the earliest and most significant ways that I was not adequately prepared to enter the world as a Jewish adult. Not teaching girls about money, giving, and power continues to be a missed educational opportunity that costs women a great deal later in our lives. It costs the Jewish organizational world as well.

Most of the children I encounter today act as though money flows endlessly from parents' pockets. (Did my parents feel the same way about children of my generation?) Most parents I talk to think that learning to manage money is a skill their children will acquire when they get older. I believe that learning about money and *zedakah* needs to begin early in life.

As a parent, I was determined to create a different awareness about money and *zedakah* in the family of my own making. In my home on Friday nights, all of the young children participating in the *Erev Shabbat* meal are given a handful of coins. They are asked to distribute these coins to the adults and hold on to some themselves. Then everyone takes turns putting coins in a *zedakah* box. It's exciting for the children to distribute the coins to the adults and to have such an important role in this activity.

Each time something special happens in our family, we put money in the *tzedakah* box with some explanation. For example, when we return safely from a trip, we put money in the box saying how lucky we are to have had a good trip and to have returned home safely. When there is a *simcha* — a birthday, bar/bat mitzvah, or special celebration, or when we feel particularly fortunate and blessed by God, we stop to remember through our *tzedakah* that others are in need and it is incumbent upon us, in our joy and bounty, to remember the need of others. These sentiments are expressed aloud in language that young children can hear and understand.

In our family, the *pushkes* are emptied twice a year (during the High Holiday season and during Pesach). Emptying and counting the money can be an exciting and special occasion. It is a wonderful opportunity to talk about where the *tzedakah* money will go and why, tying the tangible coins with the more abstract ideas of abundance and need. As children get older they can start to articulate where they would like to see their money go.

Giving children an opportunity to put their money into a *pushke* and then decide on its use is the key concept in teaching the relationship between their own money and what that money can do to help others. When the money is counted, it can be divided by the number of people in the family. For example, if there are five people in your family, each individual gets to decide where their fifth of the total *tzedakah* money will go.

Giving children an allowance (and some guidance) helps them to learn about managing their own money. In my family, allowance, like one's salary from work is not only to be used for the necessities and luxuries but also for savings and *tzedakah*. It's important to model this lesson for our children: having and managing money is about saving and about giving. The best perspective on this issue comes from my 8-year-old daughter, who when I asked her to write something for this article delivered this account:

"Every Sunday I get [an] allowance of two dollars and I give one quarter to savings and one quarter to *tzedakah*. We give money to poor people on the street, sick people in the hospital and sick or hurt pets. Every time the *tzedakah* box is full each one of us gets to choose a place to send the *tzedakah*. Every Sunday my *tzedakah* comes and goes. Every time before a big trip we put *tzedakah* in the *pushke* and when we come back we do, too. We wish for a safe trip. We do this on special occasions because we feel lucky that we have so much and we feel that we need to give to the poor so they will feel lucky also."

— Elana Burhenne-Ribnick, age 8

TEN TZEDAKAH TEACHING TIPS

- 1 Start early, very early. Have babies watch you put coins in the box. Help little ones put coins in the slot.
- 2 Making individual and family *tzedakah* boxes is a great at-home arts and crafts project. Make special decorations and stories about the boxes you create. Having different kinds of *tzedakah* boxes makes the experience of giving *tzedakah* even more interesting, especially if there is a story attached to your possession of them. Encourage children to talk about *tzedakah* boxes they make. They will get great pleasure out of telling the story to visitors.
- 3 Tie *tzedakah* to those occasions when you feel fortunate. Let kids know how blessed you feel and how you want to remember others in need during these times.
- 4 Always try to say something about money and/or *tzedakah* when coins are put in the *pushke*.
- 5 Tie *tzedakah* to allowance. Teach children that managing their money includes putting some of their “earnings” into the *pushke*.
- 6 Help children to articulate why they put money into the *pushke*.
- 7 Spend family time talking about *tzedakah*.
- 8 Make sure children participate in discussing where the *tzedakah* goes. It’s a wonderful opportunity to talk about your community, the larger Jewish community, and the world.
- 9 In talking about *tzedakah* make sure to talk about money and power — don’t make these “dirty” words. Help children learn so they can use money and power wisely.
- 10 If you can, visit one of the places to which your children have donated *tzedakah*.

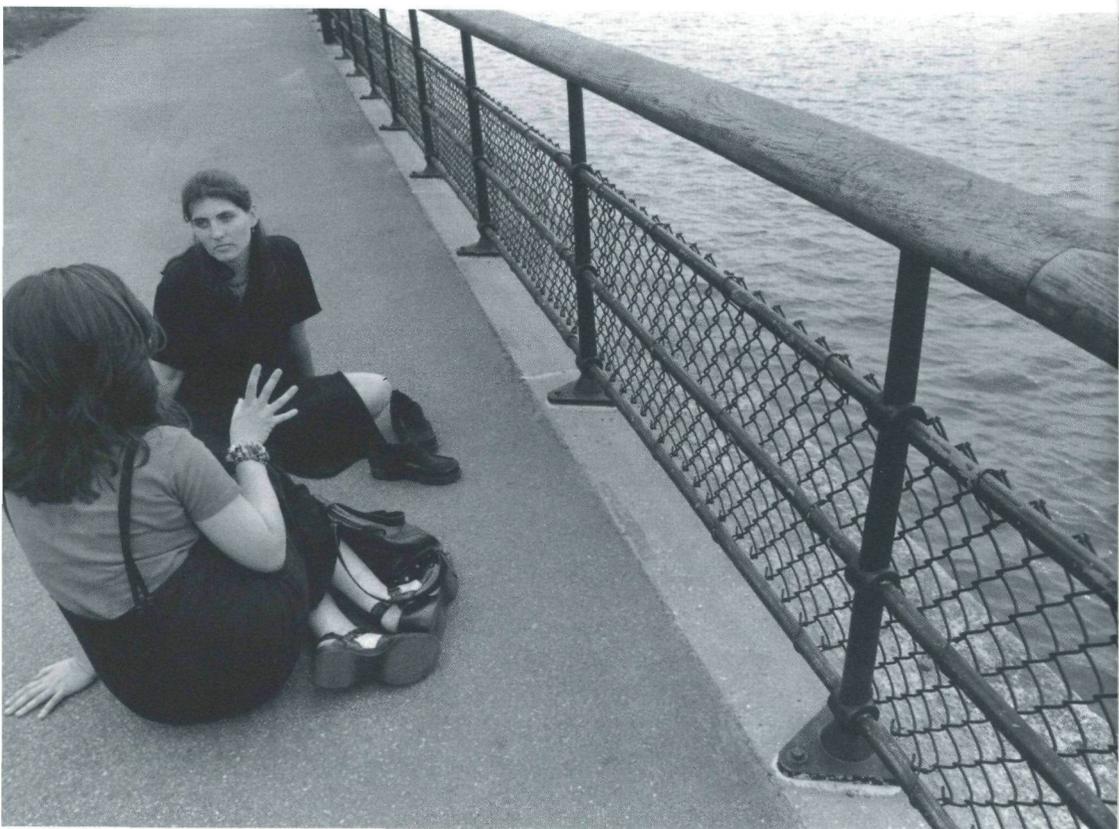
Diane P. Burhenne, a psychologist, works on strategic planning with organizations including Ma'yan.



SHARING OUR GIFTS

Incorporating Tzedakah Into Your Chanukkah Ritual

- Keep a *tzedakah* box near your Chanukiah (Chanukkah menorah). Each night after you light candles, put some money into the *tzedakah* box. Do this as a pause between lighting candles and rushing to rip open presents.
- Play *dreydl* with real money. Have everyone give the money they win (all or some of it) to *tzedakah*.
- Choose one night on which everyone in your family gets a check made out to the *tzedakah* of their choice.
- Go to a nursing home, soup kitchen or shelter for one of the nights of Chanukkah. Instead of just giving gifts and money to members of your own family, give to others — people you don't know who are in need, causes you care about.
- For a short ritual on "Rededicating Ourselves to Social Justice on the Second Night of Chanukkah," contact the Jewish Fund for Justice.
Phone: 212. 213. 2113. E-mail: JusticeUSA@aol.com.



CONFRONTING MONEY'S POWER

"I hate money," a friend of mine said to me during a somewhat heated conversation one afternoon. The statement was part of a larger conversation, a continuing conversation, that always seemed to stall at the same point. The woman sitting across from me could have been any of a number of my closest friends, all with similar profiles — early twenties, Jewish, female, progressive, independent, intelligent. Why would she, who in all other areas of her life would fight against any sort of hatred, exhibit such a strong emotion towards an inanimate object? Why is this hatred of money and rejection of wealth such a persistent theme in conversations I have with women my age?

When I think about the financial empowerment of women — teaching women to take control of their money and use it to support the issues they care about — I can't help thinking about my friend's, and my own, experiences with money and power. When I consider the idea of women using their money and power in the same way I have seen money and power used by men and in my family, I cringe. Yet, as an activist, I have become increasingly aware of the importance, even necessity, of money and power for almost every kind of change making. How can we begin to re-think the ways in which we use money to assert power? How can we begin to create a new relationship between money and power?

While I was raised in a community that taught me to question everything and to probe constantly, I found that money issues were rarely, if ever, discussed. Furthermore, though both sides of my family remained silent on most financial issues, money was granted an amazing amount of power — power to make decisions, to voice opinions and to silence the opinions of others. In some cases, money was used to do good, but in many cases it was used to manipulate or cause pain. Observing the power dynamics that existed around money in my family and feeling the weight of this powerful entity in many of my own family relationships made me distrust money — even despise it.

As I began to talk about my experiences with other young, Jewish women, I found that many of my friends have surprisingly similar stories about the use of money in their families. Some have witnessed abusive power dynamics based on financial differences between members of their families. Others have experienced first-hand the effects of financial manipulation. For some of these women, appeasing parents as part of a financial obligation can become a burden. Some who choose to assert their individuality — whether by following a "non-traditional" course of study, career path or lifestyle — literally pay a price for their independence in the loss of financial support

from their families. After having money turned against them, some of these women come to question the link between money and power. Some who see those power dynamics mirrored in the larger society, reject wealth altogether. Often times for these women, the ways in which wealth and power grant a voice in the Jewish community shadow their experiences in Jewish life and make it difficult for them to find a comfortable place within Judaism.

As women, we are all at some level aware of the experience of feeling voiceless. Whether in the realms of politics or religion, we as women are rarely given the space to publicly express our concerns; our voices often remain unheard. Marked by a perceived lack of earning power and sometimes estranged from family wealth, we can understand the experience of powerlessness and the silence that accompanies it.

Ma'yan has worked over the past few years to help women gain confidence in dealing with money issues. Ma'yan's philanthropy conferences have taught women how to use *zedakah* to make the social change that they would like to see. But now that we are beginning to understand these dynamics and to seize our power as successful and vocal women, what is our responsibility to those who feel powerless or who have not yet found their voices? How much of what Ma'yan encourages is simply training women to "play the game?" Now that we have learned how to participate in the hierarchies that once excluded us, should we, as women, begin to image a different kind of power structure? How can we help the Jewish community begin to examine and deconstruct the financial and power hierarchies that exist within it?

As a feminist, I have come to understand the importance of using my voice responsibly. I also believe that women should continue to cultivate their power in all realms. The combination of these two elements has led me to make a commitment to remaining aware of the ways that I, both knowingly and unknowingly, oppress others — especially other women. Learning to use the financial and social power I have seen around me and changing the nature of that power are not the same thing. As women continue to develop their voices, I would like to see them use these strengthened voices to change the prevailing understanding of power. Now that we are learning to "play the game," we can begin to think about ways to change the rules so that a broader range of people will be included.

This is a call for a dialogue about re-balancing power dynamics in an ever-forming community. For those of us who feel alienated by wealth, this conversation can serve as a way to begin addressing our discomfort around, even hatred of, money. For those of us who are learning to use our power, this conversation can challenge us to think about our participation in established money dynamics. It is a much-needed conversation about how we can begin to form a community that values all voices, regardless of economic means — a community that supports and welcomes all of its members. Only by continuing to learn from our experiences and histories and incorporating that knowledge into the way that we live our lives can we continue to strengthen our community and ourselves.

— Erika Katske



Editor's Note: Comments and reactions to this and all *Journey* articles are welcome. By mail: Ma'yan:
The Jewish Women's Project, 15 West 65th Street, New York, NY 10023 or by email: mayanjcc@aol.com.

BOOKS TO READ BOOKS TO GIVE

This year has brought a bounty of Jewish feminist books on topics ranging from Lubavitch women to female rabbis. Read these books! Borrow or buy them. Give them as Chanukkah gifts. Donate them to your synagogue, Hebrew or day school library, women's center, JCC library. Nudge your local Jewish bookseller to carry them. When you buy one for yourself, buy a second copy and give it to the library at your alma mater's Hillel or your children's colleges. Review them for your local Jewish and/or women's publication. The only way we are going to change our communities is through knowledge and action. Disseminating these new books and the knowledge in them is the first step.

We limited this first list to non-fiction books published in 1998. If your favorite Jewish feminist book is not here, let us know. All of the following books are available for reference in the Ma'yan library. — Susan Sapiro

Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics

By Rachel Adler. Published by Jewish Publication Society.

Addressing *halacha*, liturgy, and sexual ethics, Adler gives Jewish feminists a way to critique and reconstruct Judaism for both genders.

Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture

Edited by Joyce Antler. Published by Brandeis University Press.

Explores representations of Jewish women in film, television, literature and religious writings, such as women's *haggadot* (including Ma'yan's *The Journey Continues*).

Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Infertility and Pregnancy Loss

By Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin. Published by Jewish Lights.

Prayers, rituals and meditations for mourning this most private loss.

Which Lilith? Feminist Writers Re-Crete the World's First Woman

Edited by Enid Dame, Lilly Rivlin, and Henny Wenkart. Published by Jason Aronson.

Contemporary *midrashim* in the form of essays, poetry and prose, inspired by the first Jewish feminist of Jewish folklore and rabbinic commentary.

ReVisions: Seeing Torah Through a Feminist Lens

By Rabbi Elyse Goldstein. Published by Jewish Lights. (In Canada, Key Porter Books)

Goldstein looks at the roles and status of biblical women, re-evaluates the meaning of Jewish menstrual laws, and explores how images of God affect women's spirituality.

Silence is Deadly: Judaism Confronts Wife Beating

By Naomi Graetz. Published by Jason Aronson.

Presents attitudes towards wife abuse found in Jewish texts, both legal and *midrashic*. Shows how metaphors of abuse in biblical texts shaped later *halachic* responses to the problem.

Jewish Legal Writings by Women

Edited by Micah D. Halpern and Chana Safrai. Published by Urim/Lambda Publishing.

The first-ever collection of *halachic* (Jewish legal) articles written by Orthodox feminist scholars and teachers.

Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice

By Judith Hauptman. Published by Westview Press.

Hauptman argues that the rabbis of the Talmud tried, and sometimes succeeded in expanding women's rights and status within their patriarchal rabbinic/Greco-Roman world.

Lubavitcher Women in America: Identity and Activism in the Postwar Era

By Bonnie J. Morris. Published by SUNY Press.

Analyzes the activities of Lubavitcher women as "producers and agents of Hasidic ideology" and examines what these women gain from their activism.

The Word According to Eve: Women and the Bible in Ancient Times and Our Own

By Cullen Murphy. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Written by a Christian man, a survey of the field of feminist biblical scholarship and its practitioners, including Jewish feminist bible scholars Carol Meyers and Tikva Frymer-Kensky.

Women Who Would be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination 1889-1985

By Pamela S. Nadell. Published by Beacon Press.

Recovers the lost women in American Jewish history who paved the way for modern female rabbis.

Women in the Holocaust

Edited by Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman. Published by Yale University Press.

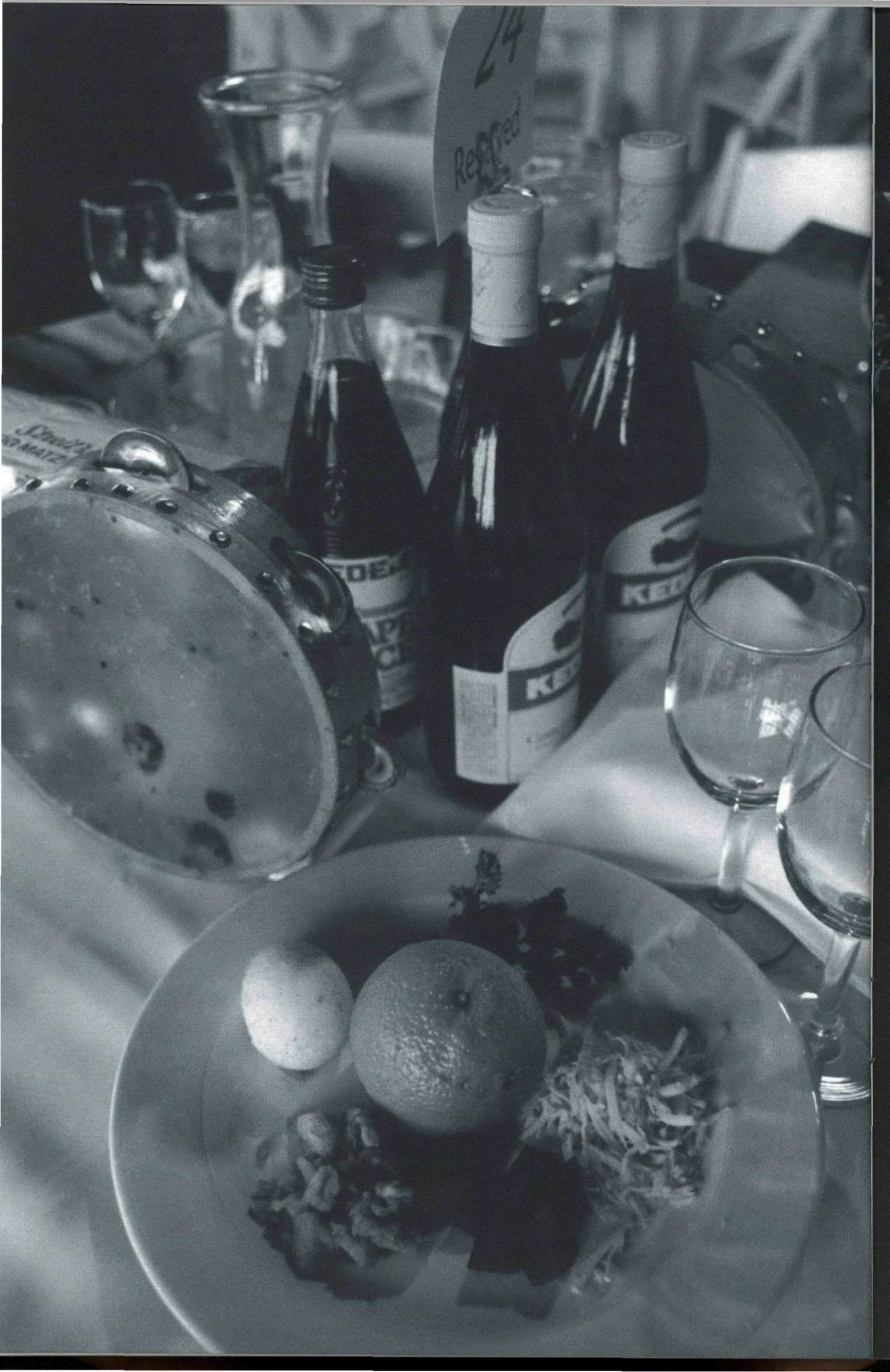
Includes articles by academics and survivors examining Jewish women's lives in the ghettos, resistance movements, and concentration camps and highlighting women's particular experiences of the Shoah.

Believe it or not, the emerging field of women and the Holocaust is under attack. Articles in Commentary Magazine (June 1998) and the Wall Street Journal have lambasted the editors of Women in the Holocaust for their "naked ideological agenda" and intent to spread "propaganda." These misogynist claims serve as a timely reminder that reading, writing, and buying books about women's experiences are still political acts. (For more see the Fall 1998 issue of Lilith Magazine.)

Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women

By Chava Weissler. Published by Beacon Press.

A long-awaited feminist history and analysis of *tkhines*, Yiddish supplicatory prayers written and recited by Western and Eastern European Jewish women.





upcoming programs

MA'YAN PROGRAMS

To register for Ma'yan Programs see page 32

Tuesday, December 8 & 15, 7:30-9 pm

Beyond the Maccabees: Discovering Judith

In this two-session workshop, we will do a close reading of *The Book of Judith*. Come and discover one of Chanukkah's most fascinating heroines. Facilitated by Tamara Cohen

\$10 JCC members/\$12 nonmembers. Held at Ma'yan, 15 West 65th Street, 8th Floor; 212. 580. 0099 ext. 232

Tuesday, January 26, 7-9 pm

Teaching Women: Creating Change

If you have been meaning to hold a program or teach a class for Women's History Month but you feel you don't have enough time or knowledge to do it right, this program is for you. We will teach you about the lives and contributions of some fabulous American Jewish women. We will provide sample programs and suggestions for creating meaningful and spirited Women's History Month programming for your classroom, school, college campus or adult ed group. All participants will receive a free set of the Women of Valor posters. Free for educators.

Held at Ma'yan (see above)

Sunday, February 28, 2-5 pm

In Their Footsteps: Celebrating Jewish Women Then and Now

Join us on this Sunday afternoon, two days before Purim and one day before the beginning of Women's History Month, to celebrate the lives of Jewish women who made a difference. Learn about Justine Wise Polier; Hannah Greenbaum Solomon and Emma Lazarus, the 1999 Women of Valor; through interactive study. Then, discover three contemporary women who will speak about the way they are continuing the work of earlier Women of Valor. Co-sponsored with the National Council of Jewish Women.

Held at National Council of Jewish Women, New York Section, 9 East 69th Street. \$5 members NCJW New York Section and JCC/\$7 nonmembers. Tea and hamantaschen. Call Ma'yan for more information.

Sunday, March 14, Monday, March 15, Tuesday, March 16

S O L D O U T

ANNUAL FEMINIST SEDERS

The spirit of community, the rousing music, the moving words and the joyous atmosphere of Ma'yan's annual pre-Passover seders are gifts you deserve to give to yourself, your friends and family. Reserve your seat or table now. The seders fill up quickly.

If you've been to one or more Ma'yan seders and you are thinking of holding one in your community, let us know. We are eager to help you take this next key step towards becoming an active participant in the transformation that the seders are all about. Call for a copy of Ma'yan's guide to planning your own feminist seder.

every week on Fridays, 8:30-9:30 am

Feminist Torah Study

Bring your whole self to the study of Torah — everything you know, everything you don't know, all your doubts, anger, love and fear. Join us as we prepare for Shabbat by studying and grappling with the weekly Torah portion.

Held at Ma'yan, 15 West 65th Street, 8th floor. No cost.

every month, 7:30-8:30 am

Early Morning Rosh Chodesh Group

Combining study, meditation and song, this participatory group offers you the chance to integrate spirituality and community into your busy schedule. Learn about the meaning of the different months and experience how this New Moon Festival can enhance your Jewish life.

Held at private homes. Call for dates and locations. \$18 registration fee per semester.

1st Wednesday of every month 4-7 pm

Ma'yan Open Office Hours

Whether you are turning fifty, having your first child, planning a wedding or commitment ceremony or struggling with illness, Ma'yan wants to help you find a meaningful way to mark the transition in your life through a creative Jewish feminist ritual. In order to make ourselves more accessible to you, we have decided to designate the first Wednesday of every month as open office hours for all those seeking resources or hands-on advice on ritual. Use our library and files, and consult with our staff. Put aside the time you deserve. Please call ahead to make an appointment. Wednesdays, Jan. 6, Feb. 3, March 3, April 14 (2nd Wednesday because of Passover).

JEWISH FEMINIST RESEARCH GROUP

The Jewish Feminist Research Group is an interdisciplinary forum for scholars, practitioners and students interested in the intersection of feminist scholarship and Jewish studies. Unpublished research and work-in-progress are shared and critiqued. Two formal respondents present at each meeting and a group discussion follows.

Wednesday, December 16, 6-8 pm

Jewish in the Background: Class, Race and Ethnicity in *The Feminine Mystique*

Presenter: Andrea Beck, doctoral candidate in Composition and Rhetoric, Miami University, Ohio.

Held in the Private Dining Room, Jewish Theological Seminary, 3080 Broadway at 122nd Street

Tuesday, January 19, 5-7 pm

Reconstructing Jewish Sexual Ethics

Presenter: Judith Plaskow, Professor of Religious Studies, Manhattan College.

Wednesday, February 17, 6-8 pm

From “The Madwoman in the Attic” to “The Women’s Room”— The Israeli Version

Presenter: Yael Feldman, Associate Professor, Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University.

Tuesday, March 23, 5-7 pm

Gender Identity and Language Socialization Among Hasidim

Presenter: Ayala Fader, doctoral candidate in Linguistic Anthropology, New York University.

Tuesday, April 27, 5-7 pm

Ritualizing Women’s Bodies: Mikvahs and Other Ceremonial Spaces in Contemporary Israel

Presenter: Susan Starr Sered, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Bar Ilan University.

All above programs unless otherwise indicated are held at Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, 33 West 42nd Street. \$25 for 8 sessions and all papers. \$5 for individual sessions. Call ahead for papers and to register; 212. 580. 0099 ext. 209

AT THE JCC

The Jewish Community Center on the Upper West Side has created a new model of Jewish community that offers access to Jewish culture, history, heritage and identity across a broad spectrum of observance, affiliation and involvement. With more than 300 programs a year, the JCC is a thriving presence for thousands of members of our community. To receive a JCC Program Guide call 212. 580. 0099.

Tuesday, December 15, 6:30-7:30 pm

Judaism and Feminism: An Interesting Paradox

Rebecca Goldstein, Erica Jong and Belva Plain speak as part of the "Meet the Writers" series, held in conjunction with the photography exhibit, *Jill Krementz: The Jewish Writer*. Held at the JCC.

Tuesday March 9, 7 pm

Emma Lazarus Birthday Party and Poetry Contest

In conjunction with Women's History Month, the JCC and Ma'yan are celebrating Jewish women, and in particular, Emma Lazarus, social activist, poet, and author of "The New Colossus," the poem which adorns the base of the Statue of Liberty. Hear local poets, learn about Emma Lazarus and enjoy birthday cake (for Emma's 150th) and party favors.

Is there a poem inside you yearning to breathe free? We invite members of the community of all ages — children, teens and adults — to submit poems of any kinds — sonnets, odes, haikus, limericks, ballads, you-name-it — on the subject of being Jewish in New York City. There will be prizes in each age category. To enter the contest send your poem and your name, address, phone number and age category (child, teen, adult) to: Emma's Birthday Bash, The JCC on the Upper West Side, 15 West 65th Street, New York, NY 10023. All entries must be postmarked by Tuesday, February 16. Good Luck!

Tuesday, March 23, 7:30-9 pm

Jewish Women in America

Deborah Dash Moore, co-editor of the two volume historical encyclopedia *Jewish Women in America* and professor of religion at Vassar College, will speak about fascinating and important — but not always well known — American Jewish women who have been influential in history. Held at the JCC.

TBA

Black/Jewish Relations: Strong Women, Passionate Feminism

Both the Black and Jewish communities have a tradition of strong women and active involvement in contemporary feminist movements. Join a panel of leaders from both communities to discuss this phenomenon of activism. Co-sponsored with Common Quest and Riverside Church. For date and time call 580. 0099 ext. 205.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

To register for these programs please use the phone numbers below. You cannot register for these programs through Ma'yan.

Monday, December 7, 7-9 pm. Meet the Author with Gene Borowitz: Chava Weissler discusses her new book, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women*. New York Kollel: A Center for Adult Jewish Study, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. 212. 824. 2272.

Monday, December 14, 8:15 pm. "The Status of Women in Israel: A Contemporary Assessment." Professor Galia Golan. The 92nd Street Y. 212. 996. 1100.

December 22-24. Drisha Institute's Winter Week of Learning. 212. 595. 0307.

Monday, January 25, 6:30 pm. Professor Pamela Nadell speaks on "Cultural Contradictions: Modern Jewish Housewives or Aspiring Career Women?" Sponsored by the American Jewish Historical Society. 212. 541. 4406.

Tuesday, January 26, 6:30-9 pm. Drisha Institute Spring Open House. One-time lectures for women about various aspects of traditional text study. 212. 595. 0307.

Sunday, January 31, 6:30 pm. Congregation Beth Simchat Torah Feminist Minyan Tu B'Shevat Seder. 212. 929. 9498.

Sunday, January 31, 7 pm. Congregation B'nai Jeshurun Tu B'Shevat Seder with Rabbi Arthur Waskow and Phyllis Berman. 212. 787. 7600 ext. 313.

Tuesday, February 16, 7:30 pm. "The Women of Antiquity: Scholar, Wife, Warrior, Synagogue Administrator." Dr. Marjorie Lehman. The 92nd Street Y. 212. 996. 1100.

"Sweet Dreams (Zise Khaloymes)" a musical show by Eleanor Reissa. "A spiritual, heart-warming journey through the life of a second generation American girl struggling with her Jewish identity and her loving mother who just won't go away." The Women's Theater Project. December 5-January 31. Box office 212. 889. 6800, ext. 208. 212. 889. 4300 for group sales.

NEW! Rosh Chodesh Group for 8th and 9th Grade Girls. Meet once a month to discuss topics of interest and discover what being a Jewish teen/girl/ woman can mean. Congregation Ansche Chesed. Sundays, 6-8 pm. 212. 865. 0600.

Book Discussion Group on new books of interest to Jewish women. First Thursday of every month, 11:30 am-1 pm. National Council of Jewish Women. 212. 535. 5900 ext. 11.

Monthly study group Hadassah's *Jewish Women: Living the Challenge* edited by Carol Diamant. Third Thursday of each month, 1:30 pm. 212. 751. 7050.

Hadassah Rosh Chodesh Celebrations: Exploring Kabbalah. Sunday, December 20, 5 pm, February 16, 6 pm. 212. 879. 3478.

CO-SPONSORED WITH MA'YAN

Saturday, March 13, 8 pm (Havdalah 7:15) Bella Festival: A Celebration of Audacious Women On this first *yarzheit* of feminist activist and former Congresswoman Bella Abzug, join in a celebration of audacious women. Co-sponsored by Ma'yan and the B'nai Jeshurun Arts and Culture Committee. Held at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, 257 West 88th Street. For details call BJ at 212. 787. 7600 or Ma'yan at 212. 580. 0099.

Wednesday, March 10, 7 pm. *Half the Kingdom* with guest speaker Dr. Alice Shalvi. View a documentary film about seven feminists from Israel, Canada and the United States. Discuss the continued relevance of issues discussed in the film with Israeli scholar and feminist leader, Dr. Alice Shalvi. Co-sponsored by Ma'yan and the Museum of Jewish Heritage. Held at Florence Gould Hall, 55 East 59th St. For information call 212. 968. 1800.



Ma'yan registration form

Fax completed form to: Erika Katske at 212. 580. 9498 or mail to 15 West 65th Street, 8th fl. New York, NY 10023

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

program registration

programs you would like to attend

program name _____ date _____ cost _____ no. of persons _____

program name _____ date _____ cost _____ no. of persons _____

program name _____ date _____ cost _____ no. of persons _____

program name _____ date _____ cost _____ no. of persons _____

total _____

seder registration/send a sister to the seder

As you make your reservations, please consider helping others attend.

Monday, March 15 / Tuesday, March 16 (circle)

Please reserve _____ place(s) at \$55 for the Ma'yan Seder on: _____

Please reserve _____ place(s) at the scholarship price of \$25 on: _____

Please reserve _____ tables (10 seats) at \$550 for the Ma'yan Seder on: _____

Please print the names and addresses of people for whom you are reserving below:
(attach extra sheet if needed)

total amount: _____ for _____ Reservations
_____ Seder Sister Fund*

*(Every \$55 gift enables another woman to attend. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.)
A check or credit card information must accompany your reservation which will only be accepted by mail. Only groups of ten will have a reserved table. All other seating will be on a first come first served basis. Reservations will be confirmed by postcard. If you have other questions, please call Ma'yan at **212. 580. 0099**

total amount for Ma'yan programs _____ **total amount for Ma'yan seder** _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: _____

Enclosed is a check made payable to JCC/Ma'yan
Checks should be made payable to JCC/Ma'yan and mailed to us at:
15 West 65th Street, 8th Floor New York, NY 10023

Please charge my credit card: Visa Mastercard American Express

Card no. _____ Exp. Date _____

Name as it appears on your card _____

CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE AND SEND

Ma'yan Staff

Eve Landau, Executive Director

Tamara Cohen, Program Director

Barbara Dobkin, Founder and Chair

Erika Katske, Office Manager/Program Assistant

Susan Sapiro, Program Associate

Ruth Silverman, Director of Special Events

Rachel Dobkin, Web Consultant

Debby Hirshman, Executive Director,

JCC on the Upper West Side

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מעין

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