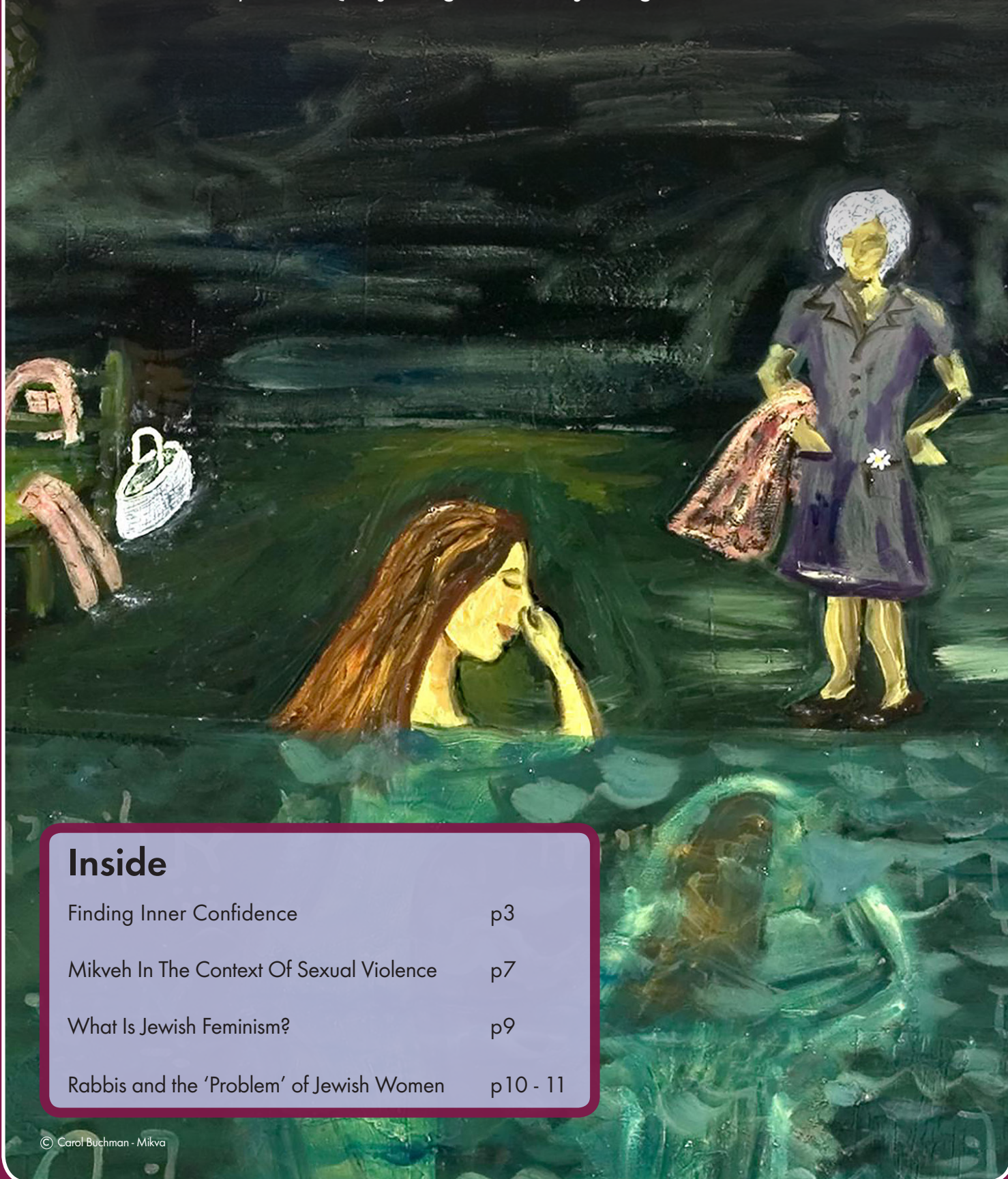




COUNCIL BULLETIN

National Council of Jewish Women of Australia Ltd.
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

We welcome Rosh Hashanah 5777!

We were delighted to recently host NCJWA Scholar in Residence 2016, Dr Elana Sztokman, Jewish Feminist leader and writer; Researcher, Educator, strategic thinker, author of award-winning books on gender equality.

The tradition of hosting NCJWA Scholars was initiated by the late Dr Geulah Solomon OAM and Malvina Malinek OAM in 1987 with the visit of our first Scholar Judith Karp, Deputy Attorney-General in Israel. She was followed in 1990 by Lea Rabin, Chair of the Israel Association for Autistic Children. In 1994 we hosted Professor Alice Shalvi, an Israeli educator and activist for women and for peace. In 2003 Yaffa Tarkay, a young Ethiopian student from Haifa University visited Australia as our Scholar. In 2010 our Scholar was Dr Sharon Shenhav, a Jerusalem-based women's rights lawyer, director of the International Women's Rights Project of the ICJW and author of 'Halakhic Solutions to the Problem of Agunot'.

BULLETIN INFORMATION

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Theme: Reproduction and fertility

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Front Cover

Mikva by Carol Buchman

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You can find her work at:

www.carolbuchman.net www.carolbuchman.org

These scholars from Israel, strengthen the flow of communication between the Jewish homeland and Jews in Australia. The educational value of these women cements NCJWA's place as the thinking women's organisation and aims to attract younger women to join as members.

I wish to thank all those involved in Elana's visit, in particular the generosity of the sponsors and supporters for the Scholar in Residence 2016 project. We were all inspired by her visit. Congratulations and thanks to all Sections for holding their Annual General Meetings. There have been some changes. Shirley Glance, President in Victoria stepped down, due to health issues, and we wish her speedy recovery. Miriam Bass has been elected as Victorian President, and we wish her an enjoyable term of office. In WA, Ester Steingieser stepped down as President, but remains on the Steering Committee, together with Jennifer Feigenbaum and Jillian Green. We wish the ACT Jewish community a most successful Appeal for their new Jewish Centre. NCJWA is proud to be a Patron, as we share a history since 1955. The Dr Fanny Reading Auditorium is being used for Canberra Section meetings.

I wish to report that the Status of Women survey has been sent out to members, and urge you to complete it as soon as possible, to enable us to plan for the future. Special thanks to Status of Women co-chairs Marilyn Gross and Negba Weiss-Dolev its preparation.

Thanks to everyone for your support and commitment to the work of NCJWA.

Wishing you and your families a Happy and Healthy Rosh Hashanah and well over the Fast.

Rysia Rozen OAM, National President

Please put on your next year's calendar –
NCJWA PLENARY 23RD – 25TH June 2017 in CANBERRA.

NCJWA SECTIONS

Brisbane

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Barbara Stewart-Kann OAM 0412 377 488 or

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Victoria

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FINDING INNER CONFIDENCE

It takes a lot of inner strength and courage to be willing to ask for what you need or fight for your rights. There has been a great deal written about the difficulties of making requests. Many people are not receiving their due because they are too afraid to speak up - they are afraid of rejection or that they will be looked at negatively. Sometimes we fear that making a request will require much more than a request - that we will have to fight for our rights and we're not sure that we have the strength or the power to do so.



When I think about the idea of confidence to ask for what I feel I deserve or fighting for rights, my first thoughts go to the daughters of Zelophehad. In Bamidbar, Chapter 27, verses 1-5 we read:

The daughters of Zelophehad, son of Hephher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh son of Joseph drew near - and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah - and they stood before Moses, before Elazar the Kohen, and before the leaders and the entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, saying: "our father died in the Wilderness, but he was not among the assembly that was gathering against Hashem in the assembly of Korach, but he died of his own sins; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers. And Moses brought their claim before Hashem.

The land of Israel was being divided among the tribes and it was said that the land would be passed down by the sons. The daughters of Zelophehad saw an injustice in this, especially for the families who did not have any sons. And so the daughters of Zelophehad joined together and went before Moshe, the leader of the nation.

They not only went before Moshe, but also went to Elazar the Kohen and to the leaders of the assembly to plead their case. According to the Netziv from Volozhin, each woman was equally as wise and were able to each represent their case before the leaders, and so they went one at a time for it to have appeared that they each came forward on their own. They acted both as a strong group, but also as strong individuals. They each knew that there was someone there to help if as an individual she started to lose strength or confidence. They formed a support system encouraging one another.

It is one thing to have the courage to go before the highest leader, but it is another to be listened to and taken seriously. The Rabbis look at these passages and wonder what was so special about these women and their actions that they were listened to and regarded highly. In Tractate Baba Batra 119b the rabbis discuss the action of these women:

It was taught: The daughters of Zelophehad were exceedingly wise, knew well how to expound Scripture, and were perfectly virtuous. They were exceedingly wise since they chose to speak at the right time; for just then ... Moses our teacher was engaged in interpreting the section on levirate marriage. So they said,

If in levirate marriage our status is like that of sons [ie, it is only relevant if a father dies without sons or daughters], , then give us, like a son a possession in the land. If not, then our Mother should be subjected to a levirate marriage. At once, "Moses brought their cause before the Lord." The daughters also knew well how to expound Scripture [learn from the Torah] for they said, "If our father had a son, we would not have spoken, or even if that son had a daughter, we would not have spoken." They were also perfectly virtuous, since they married only men who were worthy of them. (Sefaria translation)

Rashi, the French Medieval commentator, says that when the Rabbis say that the women were "wise" it was that they were wise with respect, or derech eretz. And that they chose the right timing and the proper place to say what they had to say.

There is a lot that we can learn from these women, these sisters. It takes a lot of inner strength and courage to be willing to ask or fight for what we need. Though it is possible to fight on our own, this is a sure way to burn out. If we have friends, family, community organisations or even strangers showing support the fight is a bit easier. It is about finding the right words. At times we see only the injustice, and in our place of anger or frustration we lose our ability to speak eloquently or even respectfully. We need to remember, even when we see that there is a wrong, speaking respectfully will make our voice even louder. And finally, we shouldn't forget that success may also be about the timing. We need to think about when the other person will have time to sit and listen to our request, when they will not be distracted by another matter that they might feel is more important.

In the coming year, it is my hope that, like the daughters of Zelafchad, we are able to find the inner-confidence to ask for what we need. I hope, too, that we are able to appreciate the effort involved in taking that first step and that we are able to support each other and be strong together.



Eryn London is the scholar in residence at the ACT Jewish Community through the end of November. She is in her final year of smicha studies at Yeshivat Maharatz in New York.

Image credit: Daughters of Zelophehad by Bonnie Lee Roth

INSPIRING WOMEN & THEIR PROJECTS

JAM

JAM, a new mentoring program for 14-16 year old girls in the Jewish Community is being established by NCJWA (VIC) in December 2016. The program is the brainchild of Ainie Mills, Alexandra Davis and Morgan Lincoln. This dynamic trio have been working for over a year to bring this project to fruition. "There are so many expectations for young girls and this - together with changing body image, pressures of social media and identity issues - can lead to the need for confidence" say Jainie, Alexandra and Morgan.



The aim of the project is to empower young Jewish girls and instill a sense of self-worth, independence and self belief in those taking part in the program. There will be four main areas of focus, personal, social, work and community. Launching with 'JamFest' a day of fun activities open to all Jewish girls aged between 14-16 in Melbourne. The program itself will commence at the start of the 2017 school year. Initially the pilot program will work with girls enrolled in Jewish Day Schools. Each girl will be matched with a trained mentor, volunteer - aged between 19-25.

NCJWA (VIC) is thrilled that Gandel Philanthropy has recognised the need to support Jewish teenage girls at this critical state of their lives. JamFest has been made possible by the support of Scott Winton.

Befriend a Child in Detention

Befriend a Child in Detention is a community project committed to seeing an end to the detention of child asylum seekers. Established by June Factor, writer and editor the project has two main goals. To inspire and support compassionate Australians to make a positive connection with the children and families living in detention, to ameliorate their experience, to raise awareness of their circumstances, and to advocate for positive change.

To remain silent about the shameful and unjust mistreatment of refugees, to turn one's back and say 'they are not our people', is to allow bigotry and cruelty to flourish.

Presently there are more than 100 refugee and asylum seeker children struggling to survive with their families on the tiny, barren Pacific island of Nauru. (The Immigration Department's statistics only acknowledges 49 asylum seeker children there - deliberately obliterating mention of the children of people already found to be refugees). There are 296 children in community detention - subject at any time to being hauled back into a detention centre or sent to Nauru. Some of these children have been in some form of detention since birth.

The program has sent the children in detention hundreds of children's books (all donated), and letters (many written by

Books Out Loud

Books Out Loud (NSW) is a non-denominational, free of charge reading and social outreach program established in 2012 by NCJWA (NSW) member Miri Orden. The program trains volunteers to read and discuss books, short stories, essays and poems with residents at nursing homes. This creates an ongoing relationship with books, for those who may experience some difficulties reading on their own. It's also a social time with sharing stories together providing a stimulating experience that contributes to a sense of belonging and confidence. For many, being read to is a pleasure some not experienced since childhood.



Modelled on a Victorian program, Miri Orden built on her own long term experience as a volunteer playing accordion and providing entertainment for residents in nursing homes. Books Out Loud NSW now regularly visits ten local nursing homes

In addition to Miri's Orden's role as Books Out Loud NSW coordinator, she is a member of the NCJWA NSW Steering Committee and President of the Jewish Folk Centre, Ha'Moadon Ha'Israeli, which provides a meeting place and social activities for the Israeli community in Sydney.



schools). Some Penpal connections have resulted. Sadly, some detention centres have refused to distribute the letters. The project is finding new ways to make contact, via the ubiquitous smartphone. And have developed a program for schools - Links, Not Chains - which encourage empathy and an understanding of human rights. It has also produced special cards to send to politicians - they need to know that there is growing opposition to their treatment of asylum seekers.

This is not a Jewish issue - it is an ethical responsibility for all Australians. But with a long historical experience of seeking asylum, and remembering how urgently we needed Australia to welcome us as refugees in the 1930s and early 40s, and after WWII, we cannot be silent.





A PLACE FOR WOMEN

Tour around Israel and you will find archeological remains of ancient mikvaot; many are over 2000 years old. But what is a mikveh and what was it used for? A mikveh is a collection of water used for ritual purification. While historically having served a variety of purification purposes, primarily those linked with the Temple, today the mikveh is almost exclusively used by women for (spiritual) purification after menstruation.

In Israel, immersion in the mikveh is a ritual regularly performed by religious and secular women alike. Sephardi women are often punctilious about using the mikvah, and immerse regularly even if they don't identify as "religious". Most religious women go on a monthly basis except when they are pregnant or nursing. The Rabbinate necessitates that all Jewish brides (secular or religious) immerse before marriage. Indeed, over half a million Jewish women immerse in Israel each month. There are approximately 1000 mikvaot in the country – from Eilat to Metula – and they even exist in the smallest of yishuvim and kibbutzim. And while some love the mikveh, some hate it, and many have mixed emotions, most married Israeli women have an opinion and a vested interest in the topic.

With the prominence and significance of mikvah in so many women's lives, one would expect that women would be at the helm, and that mikveh would be welcoming to Jewish women regardless of their personal religious practices and beliefs. One would expect it to be a place where women don't feel judged, questioned, threatened, or rejected by the religious establishment but rather embraced and enveloped by the waters of an ancient and particularly feminine rite. But alas, this ideal vision is not quite the reality.

Sparked by complaints about the invasive treatment received by women at their local mikvaot, The Center for Women's Justice and ITIM launched a legal battle in 2014 leading to a Supreme Court decision mandating protection of women's privacy and prohibiting mikveh attendants from interrogating their clients' regarding their religious performance or beliefs. The Supreme Court's ruling declared that mikvaot in Israel, as public institutions supported by government funding under the Ministry of Religious

Affairs, were mandated to be open to all who wished to use them. This important legal precedent signified a change that would be an important step in the evolution of the mikveh experience for Israeli women.

Parallel to this legal battle, The Eden Center (www.TheEdenCenter.com), which I founded in 2010, has initiated wide ranging educational and advocacy programming with the goal of enhancing and enriching the mikveh experience. More than 50,000 women each year have had better experiences with the 160 Eden-trained mikveh attendants who were prepared to be more sensitive, knowledgeable, welcoming and helpful. Our training includes sensitivity training, crisis and health prevention, and how to refer women to professionals, so that the mikveh can be a community resource. A significant part of our success is due to our partnerships, including the local rabbinic leadership and religious councils, with whom we have built relationships of trust and mutual respect.

These important milestones, however, were threatened this summer by political maneuvering. MK Moshe Gafni of the United Torah Judaism party (Haredi), proposed new legislation to transfer mikvaot from the authority of the local religious councils to the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbinate. This was done out of the motivation to bypass a recent Supreme Court's ruling which allowed more access to the state-funded "public institution" of mikveh. The final wording of the legislation focused on barring Conservative and Reform conversions in public ritual baths, but the legislation affects all women. Firstly, the idea that Rabbis are barring women from the "public space" is a dangerous precedent in the debate over who controls the mikveh. Secondly, as a result of the public discourse over the bill, the lines have been drawn and immersions are being more closely scrutinized, taking away freedoms women quietly enjoyed for years. The protections so carefully nurtured and the efforts to enhance the experience of Jewish women in the one religious space which is truly theirs, are being undone by a calculated legislative grab.

Moving mikvaot to the jurisdiction of a single, centralized, bureaucratic rabbinic authority threatens the mikveh as a safe and sacred space for women. In the course of my extensive research I have found that numerous women have stopped immersing altogether because of the invasive treatment they received at the mikveh. Moreover, negative experiences at the mikveh often exacerbated the hatred and animosity to religion and religious institutions. Moving the mikvaot to the sole authority of the Rabbinate will only mean that more women will have experiences which will distance them from Judaism. MK Gafni's bill is a bad move for Jewish women. And yet, despite my concerns regarding the political machinations over who ultimately "owns" the mikveh, I retain hope that our grassroots efforts will continue to ensure that the mikveh remains a female sanctuary – not just in the meaning of a safe haven – but as a sacred space. Mikvah has the potential to unite women and allow them to nurture their inner spirituality, their marital relationships, and their interaction with tradition. In its ideal, mikveh is a sacred space to hold our important moments – for the (Cont p6)

good and the bad – miscarriages, the desire to bear children, passage through menopause, or emergence from illness. A place where women are empowered to actively connect to tradition, binding us to generations of Jewish women before and after us. Our efforts to enable women to access the potential inherent in the mikveh, and educate mikveh attendants about how they can help to facilitate that process will continue unabated. As we look forward, we see women's full inclusion in every aspect of this ancient sacred space, not only in Israel, but around the Jewish world. Our work will facilitate this change, and help women increasingly recognize that they deserve more at the mikveh.



Dr Naomi Marmon Grumet is the founder and educational director of the Eden Center, a Jerusalem-based non-profit organization that integrates women's health awareness, crisis prevention and intimacy education into mikveh and connects women to resources of support within the Jewish community. Dr. Grumet's extensive research on contemporary mikveh observance serves as the inspiration for much of the Eden Center's programming.

MIKVEH: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

It is not only the religious women of our community for whom mikveh is important. Living in the relatively small community of South East Queensland, the availability of mikvaot is important in the lives of the Jewish women who live here, and those passing through. Proximity between the Brisbane and Gold Coast communities, both Orthodox and Progressive, means there is a great deal of interconnection, interaction and traffic between them.

Personally I have attended both Orthodox mikvaot. Each is supported by a caring sensitive attendant and I have luxuriated in the experience of both. For me visiting the mikveh connects me with a great grandmother, long departed. I feel her influence on my life all of these generations later, connected by the water, each time I immerse.

Anecdotally some Brisbane women prefer the Gold Coast mikveh but Gold Coast women also happily drive the 180km return trip, preferring Brisbane. It's not an onerous trip, and allows you solitary think time, or the chance to play your own music both journeys. Sometimes solitude is precious. Both mikvaot are regularly visited by travellers from across religious spectrum. For me it is fundamental for a Jewish community to offer community, hospitality and lifestyle support services to travellers.

In each city there are also private facilities used within the Progressive communities for their mikveh needs. I have enjoyed the opportunity of one of the previously existing private facilities, as well as to join with a group of women in glorious Moreton Bay, preparing for the wedding of a progressive kallah.

Karen (Prior) Demartini-Scacheri

Arnold Bloch Leibler

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MIKVEH IN THE CONTEXT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The “mikveh war” in Israel that grew in the past few months is thought to be a battle between the Orthodox authorities and non-orthodox groups in Israel. But a less recognized struggle has to do with a Supreme Court appeal. Women from the organization ITIM are asking the court to rule that a woman has the right for privacy in the mikveh. This goes against the common practice, supported and encouraged by the Rabbanut (The Orthodox Authorities), that the Mikveh Ladies should supervise the women’s visits and be present when they enter the water to make sure that they perform this Mitzvah properly.

A few years ago I met a young religious woman who was brutally assaulted when she was still in her high-school years. This extraordinary young woman felt that she needed to wash away the pain in her body in the one spiritual way she knew from a very young age – visiting the mikveh. Although she was not married yet, and never visited the Mikveh before, she felt the need to do this as part of her recovery path.

Because she was not married, most mikvaot in Israel would not let her in. If they were willing to consider her visit, they wanted to know why she was asking to use the mikveh. What a horrible dilemma! On the one hand, she is asked to uncover a personal secret to a complete stranger - not to mention the looks and questions of members of her community who will see her entering the mikveh. On the other hand, without this disclosure she would be forced to carry a ‘spiritual-pain’ for years to come.. Survivors of sexual violence are struggling with different privacy issues. Some might have a problem to express their objection to be exposed in front of a strange woman. After all, they have said ‘no’ in the past and no one has respected this. So they have learned that they are not entitled to say ‘no’. Others might have a problem explaining why they need to visit the Mikveh, because they carry their secrets and are not ready to open it yet. But many of them see the Mikveh as a way to cleanse their body from its traumas and regain a sense of purity. (By no mean, am I saying that a woman who was sexually assaulted in not-clean! Yet different women have different and personal ways for recovery that should be respected).

In recent years some Rape Crisis Centers serving Jewish religious communities, such as the Tahel Crisis Center in Jerusalem, have began to train Mikveh Ladies on how to make their mikvaot more trauma-informed. This is particularly important because of

the reality that many women are subjected to sexual violence and we know that this happens as much in religious communities as in the wider community. Training helps Mikvot to become more sensitive and aware of the needs of the different women who come through their doors. And, in the process, they make the place more sensitive for all women, not just those affected by gender based violence

For all women, a visit in the mikveh should be seen as a very personal experience, regardless of the feminine cycle or of marital customs. The fewer questions we ask women when they enter the Mikveh, and the less we supervise their time in the Mikveh, the more we invite women to take part in this ancient and spiritual custom that represent the power of nature to purify our bodies and souls as women, in times of celebrations and in times of pain.



Shani Aloni, a certified Lawyer and a Social Worker, is the Executive Director of Haifa Rape Crisis Center (HRCC). The HRCC, an NGO dedicated to opposing all forms of sexual violence, provides services regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status. The HRCC is supported by NCJWA.

AUSTRALIAN MIKVAOT

In Australia, there are Mikveot in all major cities that have Jewish communities, some are available at different times for women /men. Whilst we have attempted to make this list comprehensive and inclusive, we are aware that not all Mikveh facilities are publically listed. Please check with your local congregation. It is recommended to ring a few days ahead for enquiries or to make an appointment.

PLACE	Name/Run by	Contact
Adelaide	Adelaide Hebrew Congregation	08 8338 2922
Brisbane	South Brisbane Synagogue	0402 039 956
Canberra	Mikveh Chaya Muska Chabad	02 6108 3927
Gold Coast	Mikveh Shoshana	07 5570 1851
Hobart	Mikveh of Tasmania	03 6223 7116
Melbourne	Mikveh Chaya Muska	03 9570 6707
	Melbourne Mikveh Chaya Muska	03 9527 7555
	Caulfield Mikveh	03 9528 1116
	Chabad Malvern	03 9822 4985
	Melbourne City Baths	03 9658 9011
Perth	Perth Hebrew Congregation	08 9271 0539
Sydney	Sydney Mikveh Society (Bondi)	02 9130 2509
	South Head Mikveh Aziza	02 9371 7300
	Sydney Mikveh Society (St Ives)	02 9440 0025



GETTING WHAT SHE DESERVES AFTER 17 YEARS

Lana Krain will never tell you she is a hero. In fact, she might not even know she is one. However, after dealing with a 17-year battle of Jewish Get denial, Lana deserves to be recognized and acknowledged as a hero of the Jewish community.

Lana's ex-husband left her and her two young boys in 1999, after seven years of marriage. He took all the money and jetted off to Israel, where he was originally from. When Lana asked for a Get, she was told she would be granted one in exchange for \$US50,000. Not long after, Lana was unable to contact anyone in his family. She managed to track down his sister a few years later – only to be told to never ring again.

Lana went to the Beth Din (the Rabbinic Court) to try to arrange a Get. She commented:

I tried to get the Beth Din to help me find him, but nothing was ever done.

Over the years I spoke to many different Rabbis. They said they would try to help, but nothing ever came of it. Two years ago, a friend of mine found out he was in jail; so I went to the Beth Din again, but still – nothing happened.

This phrase [Aguna, being chained] rings true – because you are stuck. You're chained up in one situation and you can't go anywhere unless you abandon your religion. You are a prisoner,

Lana met Mark Klapish, who, like Lana, wasn't a religious Jew. They decided to marry, but because Lana was denied a Get, Mark and Lana were only able to have a civil marriage. Lana and Mark decided not to have children together, as the kids would be considered mamzerim, illegitimate under Jewish religious law.

Lana says not being able to have more children has been the hardest challenge.

It would have been nice for Mark and I to have been married under a chuppah at the time. But having kids recognised as Jewish is the main thing. It was really frustrating for both of us. Luckily, I already had two gorgeous kids and Mark was allowed to stand at the Bimah for the boys bar mitzvah's as their dad – because he's the one who brought them up and raised them. But Mark never had his own children. Because of this [Get denial], he missed out, and my boys could have had siblings, and my parents could have had more grandchildren.

In March last year, Lana was approached by the Unchain My Heart (UMH) organization, who were putting together a panel and forum to talk about Get denial in the Melbourne Jewish community. At the forum, Lana told the audience of her 17-year story of Get denial:

The whole thing is revolting – it's a horrible part of our religion that is so wrong on so many levels. Something has to change. You are playing with women's lives..

After the event, Rabbi Goodheart, the registrar of the Beth Din, approached Lana and told her that her Get case would be reopened. After 17 years, Lana had no expectations. The Beth Din were able to track down Lana's ex-husband living in Ashkelon, Israel. With their help, Lana received her Get on December 3rd 2015.

It took a public forum, public pressure, phone calls and the eventual support of the Beth Din for Lana to finally get her Get. After 17 years, Lana considers it a victory, but on one level nothing more than a piece of paper.

Mark and I have been together for 15 years now – it's not going to make any difference. The only thing the get has done is give me closure. It's always been at the back of my mind, so now it's totally over. A weight has been lifted. But I really feel for the young women. Especially religious young women – their life is effectively over.

Lana would like to see the Beth Din's role in the Get process reviewed and restructured. She believes a panel of women, who are voluntarily engaged in the process of tracking down the husbands, would be more effective and efficient than the current system. Lana acknowledges that the Beth Din are under resourced and underfunded, but she believes more can be done to help these struggling women.

It's mental and psychological abuse...What has to be done for this law to change? These women are stuck and there is no solution to help them.

Lana is more than willing to speak to any woman in this situation and help in any way she can. She will go to the Beth Din with them and help track down their husbands.

Nowadays, superheroes aren't identified for their superhuman powers or their flashy outfits. It is the ordinary person who is courageous, empowering and self-sacrificing that deserve the heroic banner.

Lana Krain is one of the many heroic Jewish women who have battled through this challenging and inequitable gett process. It's an outdated law that can have a lasting and damaging impact on many women's lives.

Lana waited 17 years. Others have waited 40+. These heroic women need help. And more needs to be done to help them.



Tiarne Swersky is a sports journalism student at La Trobe University in Melbourne. She has worked at the Australian Open and Fox Footy, and aspires to work full-time in the industry after studying.

WHAT IS JEWISH FEMINISM?

What is a Jewish feminist? Are her concerns different from those who do not imagine themselves this way? Can one be a feminist who happens to be Jewish or a Jew who happens to be a feminist, or is more involved?

In this column we present the views of a range of Jewish feminists about their visions of Jewish feminism. In future issues will ask this of a range of Jewish women. If you'd like to contribute, please contact me, Melinda Jones (Editor).

Dina Brawer: My feminism is anchored in the concept of *Tzelem Elokim*, the proposition that men and women are equally created in God's image. It is critical that we close the gap between what women are achieving in their secular education and professional lives on one hand and the often more limited education and opportunities within the sacred religious space.

I am passionate about Torah study and Jewish observance and this is what drives my Orthodox feminism. I see the new opportunities for women's advanced Torah study and ritual participation created by the Orthodox feminist movement as critical not just to women, but as a means of enriching and renewing the entire Jewish community.



Dina Brawer is a rabbinical student at Yeshivat Maharat. In her role as JOFA UK Ambassador she has initiated a feminist movement within Orthodox Judaism in the UK. She was recently listed in The Jewish Chronicle's Power 100 List of individuals who are most influential in shaping the UK Jewish community.



Lee Ann Bassier is the new CEO of NCJWA (Vic). She was previously Reader & Associate Professor in the La Trobe Law School. Lee Ann has published widely in the fields of family law and the rights of people with disabilities.

Lee Ann Bassier: Judaism and feminism are core to my being. As a Masorti (Conservative) Jew, equality between men and women, as well as those who do not fit within this binary, is a key feature in Jewish life. As a feminist my world view is shaped by human rights concepts of the dignity of the person, equality (by which I mean substantive equality and not just same treatment) and the notion of full inclusion and participation in society. As a Jewish feminist, my commitment to rights and equality is informed by my understanding of *Tikkun Olam* and *Tzedakah*, mitzvot which guide my professional and personal life in the Jewish and general communities, at a local and global level.

Anne Morris: I became a feminist once the injustices of the world undermined my youthful beliefs that the world was a fair place. My personal experiences threw another reality at me – that women lacked equal access to justice and respect, and that misogyny formed a large and ugly part of Australian – and world – culture. When I later worked in women's services I discovered that much accepted wisdom is in fact prejudice and rationalisation benefitting the privileged and damning others to a lesser existence. By stigmatising people based on gender, sexuality, race or culture, we exclude them from access to systems of power. I am proud that feminism as I know it doesn't just fight for itself but for justice for all. I am proud that as a Jew, I see beyond my family and community to the betterment of all – embodied in the principle of *Tikkun Olam*. For me there is no conflict, only greater enrichment, in being simultaneously a Jew and a feminist.



Anne Morris was Chair of Status of Women for ICJW for 8 years, and is now Chair of Environment and Sustainable Development for ICJW. Having worked for many years in the women's and community sector, her PhD focused on improving organisations' responses to mothers and children in violence.

AGUNOT: GETTING HELP

There are thousands of Jewish women worldwide stuck in abusive marriages as a result of the law of the Get. These Agunot are chained to men who wield power over them, their children and their futures.

Agunah and Her Get (a Toronto based NGO), who generously provided images for this issue, will assist an Agunah anywhere in the world before, during and after the Get process. They are available to talk and consult with her twenty four hours a day (excluding Shabbos and Jewish holidays). Their services are completely free of charge, completely confidential and are done purely L'shaim Shamayim – for the Mitzvah of helping an Agunah receive her Get.

Other organisations like Unchain My Heart, in Melbourne (supported by NCJWA) and ORA in the USA are also doing amazing work to support agunot, although ultimately this matter needs to be resolved by Halachic authorities.

Unchain My Heart: <https://www.facebook.com/Unchain-My-Heart-1407786212860241/>

ORA: <http://www.getora.org/>

Aguna and Her Get: <http://agunahandherget.com/>



RABBIS AND THE ‘PROBLEM’ OF JEWISH WOMEN

Western Australia

When I was in Melbourne a few months ago as NCJWA Scholar-in-Residence, I participated in a riveting panel discussion on the issue of agunot, women denied divorce. The event, co-sponsored by the phenomenal activist group Unchain my Heart, followed a screening of the film, “Mekudeshet”, which documents the harrowing stories of three agunot in the Israeli rabbinical courts. The event attended by many local rabbis, and in fact Rabbi Mordechai Gutnick was on the panel. It was exciting for me to see actual engagement between the Jewish feminist community and the Rabbinic community. That signaled to me some important progress in underway in Australia.

During the question and answer period, a woman in the audience asked me, “Would you want your children to get married in the rabbinate?” I hesitated before answering, to which she responded, “Well, I guess I know your answer.” The true answer, of course, is that my children will get married in whatever way they choose to get married. But if I had my druthers, I would not want them stepping foot inside the Israeli Rabbinate if they could avoid it. I have been active in women’s organizations in Israel for over 20 years, and I have seen in person much of what was screened in the movie – the agony, torture and abuse that women are subjected to when they enter the divorce system in Israel. I would want my children to do everything they can to avoid all that. If that means not having a Jewishly recognized marriage in Israel, that seems like it might be the price that has to be paid.

I’m not alone. Professor Susan Aranoff, a longtime Orthodox feminist and agunah-rights activist, stood up at a conference on Agunot at Bar Ilan University over a decade ago and announced that she would not let her daughter marry in a kosher Jewish wedding. She would use her Talmudic knowledge, she said, to insert something “unkosher” into her daughter’s wedding just in case she would one day need to invalidate the whole thing. Anything to avoid the rabbinate. That is a crazy thing to have to do, and yet the current situation of Rabbinic abuse continues to drive people away from Judaism rather than towards it.

This is a strong sentiment among Israelis of diverse backgrounds. According to a recent study of the organization Hiddush that promotes religious freedom, the number of couples who prefer living together out of wedlock rather than marrying through the Rabbinate rose by 30% over two years. In fact, between 2012 and 2014, the number of unwed Jewish couples living together jumped from 65,000 to 84,000. Many of these include couples that actually got married in other ways – such as in unregistered non-Orthodox marriages. Ironically, many people avoiding the Rabbinate are actually Orthodox, protesting not the halakha itself but the Rabbinic control, coercion and abuse. Rabbis who are not on the list of “okayed” rabbis can be arrested for performing unrecognized weddings – as can the bride and groom. Even Orthodox Rabbis like Chuck Davidson of Beit Shemesh continue to test their own fates by conducting unofficial weddings, something that Reform and Conservative rabbis have been doing for a while.

Ironically, attempts to avoid the Rabbinate may not even work. Vered Shavit, for example, wanted to avoid the Rabbinate altogether, so she got married in a completely unrecognized Reform ceremony and never registered as married. But when her husband decided to file for divorce, he went straight to the rabbinical courts and said he wanted a Get. Even though the two were never officially married, for divorce purposes, the rabbinical judges said that they were, and made poor Vered – a woman who had tried so hard to avoid the rabbinate – come to receive her Get. Her story is more than just a cautionary tale. It is a frightening precedent for rabbinical co-opting of power, no matter what Israelis try to do.

To be fair, in Melbourne, Rabbi Mordechai Gutnick tried very hard to distance himself from the abuses of the Israeli Rabbinical judges that he saw on the screen. He and the other Rabbis in attendance seemed genuinely engaged with the issue and interested in alleviating women’s suffering at the hands of the Rabbinate. But it is clear that dealing with the Rabbinate is something of a crapshoot. Women walking into a Rabbinical court have no idea who they will be dealing with, and the amount of leeway that Rabbis have gives them tremendous ability to make women’s lives miserable.



Victoria



Canberra



Brisbane

Meanwhile in Israel, the Rabbinate continues to co-opt power. Over the past few years, Rabbinical courts have started reversing conversions, something that has never been done throughout the course of Jewish history. Revoking conversions has been part of the ongoing power struggle that Rabbinical Courts have with the secular state. It is a way for the Rabbis to dismiss and delegitimize the Special Conversions Court that was set up by the Prime Minister's Office over a decade ago in order to help immigrants from the Former Soviet Union expedite their integration into Israel. The Rabbinic Courts, threatened with the loss of power and authority, have been undoing these conversions at every opportunity, in order to "stick it to the secular government", so to speak, without any regard whatsoever for the real lives of the people they throw under the bus. It is all about power.

This year, the Rabbinate took matters one step further in order to regulate who gets to immerse in the mikveh, the ritual bath. The mikveh is used primarily by married religious women following menstruation in order to "purify" themselves for sex. But it is also used as part of the conversion process. Ultra-Orthodox legislators led by Moshe Gafni passed a bill this year forbidding non-Orthodox use of the mikveh, a move intended to put up yet another firewall to block entry into the Jewish people by anyone

that they are not in control of. The Rabbinate and their legislative body-guards are trying to bully the entire Israel into compliance. They want to be the absolute gate-keepers over who is and who isn't Jewish – not only in Israel but for Jews all over the world.

The good news is that people are starting to rebel. Whether by getting married in other ways – or not at all – or fighting for alternative legislation, signs of discontent with absolute Rabbinic control are slowly starting to emerge. And Jews around the world are getting involved. This is a crucial moment in the trajectory of the Jewish state, a moment of transition over belonging, identity, and control over entry and exit to the Jewish people. I would invite and urge Jewish Australia to take a strong role in helping decide what is next.



Dr Elana Maryles Sztokman is an award-winning author, sociologist, educator, activist and thinker in the field of Orthodox Jewish feminism. She has lectured on gender in several institutes for higher education, and has also worked as Executive Director of JOFA, The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, from 2012-2014.

In May NCJWA Scholar-in-Residence, Dr Elana Sztokman, toured NCJWA sections to speak to not just our members but the broader Jewish community. It was a very busy three weeks, that took in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane. Her topics were mainly related to the status of women in Israel today, with many eye-opening examples given of the silencing of women's voices, the covering of women's images, and the treatment of women in relation to marriage, divorce, mikveh and conversion.

Her talk in Melbourne on gender and pop culture looked at broader issues concerning the objectification of women in advertising, video song clips and social media. Elana's presentations in schools were particularly interesting as she sought to create awareness of the ways women are sometimes portrayed and treated within Israel and Judaism. Her views were at times met with some resistance, however these are discussions that must be had. One male student even commented that women in the army can be a 'threat' to Israel's security. Her presentation at the ANU Gender Institute was very well received, showing a comparison of the status of women in Israel with the rest of the world. At a number of talks she made the point, when looking at women in leadership in Israel, that Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel from 1969 to 1974, is often held up as an example of what women can achieve in Israel, and yet that was 40 years ago, with no woman in the role since, and little advancement for women politically.

Many of the issues she discussed are elaborated on in her

latest book, "The War on Women in Israel. A Story of Religious Radicalism and the Women Fighting for Freedom" (Sourcebooks, 2015). This is a must read for those wanting to know more on the situation in Israel. If you are interested to keep up with Elana's work I encourage you to follow her blog, www.jewfem.com.

Elana encourages women to find their power, to find their voice. She found her visit to NCJWA sections incredibly empowering and invigorating for herself, building relationships and gaining support for her work. As she herself said "It offered a glimpse of what is possible when we come together." Elana's passion in speaking out for women's rights in Israel and the Jewish world was like a call to action that NCJWA should take up over the coming months. This is vital work that is precisely our *raison d'être*.

Di Hirsh, Shirley Glance and Rysia Rozen were instrumental in arranging Elana's visit to Australia.



NCJWA SUPPORTS NATIONAL JEWISH CENTRE



On the 20 August 2016 a launch of the ACT Jewish Community's Capital Campaign for the upgraded Centre was held at Old Parliament House in Canberra. NCJWA was represented by Dr Anita Shroot and the keynote address was delivered by The Executive Council of Australian Jewry's Public Affairs Director Alex Ryvchin.

NCJWA is providing pivotal support for the third time in the history of the ACT Jewish community. NCJWA has stepped up as a Patron of the appeal, one of a range of leading Jewish organisations and individuals providing backing for the project as it seeks major donors.

This historic project involves expansion of the Centre to serve as the focus for Australian Jewry in the national capital. The current building was erected in 1971 as a national centre for Australia's Jews, a memorial to Jewish servicemen and women who fell in active service and a religious, social and cultural centre for Jews in Canberra and the region. It is an example of communal harmony, with Orthodox and Progressive congregations worshipping in separate parts of the building but combining for all other activities.

The erection of the Centre was funded by donations from several benefactors, including NCJWA, whose generosity was marked by the naming of the upstairs auditorium in honour of NCJWA founder Dr Fanny Reading MBE. The building was opened on 12 December 1971 by then Prime Minister Billy McMahon and plaques in the auditorium record its opening by his wife Sonia McMahon in the presence of then NCJWA National President Mina Fink and other dignitaries. NCJWA has supported the Canberra Jewish community since

its formation in 1951. In 1955 Israeli ambassador Mordekhai (Max) Nurock organised an Israel Independence Day function in Canberra, although he was still based in Sydney (the Israeli Embassy in Canberra was built in 1958 with funding by the Australian Jewish community). Among those invited were National President Vera Cohen MBE, National Life President Dr Fanny Reading and Honorary Treasurer Mrs Gerald de Vahl Davis. Determined to form a branch of NCJWA in the national capital Mrs. Cohen organised a morning tea for Canberra Jewish women at the Hotel Canberra on Thursday 28 April 1955. The 12 women present banded together to form NCJWA Canberra, with Ruth Mendelsohn, wife of ACT Jewish Community President Dr Ron Mendelsohn, as its first president. Since then NCJWA Canberra has been a hardworking mainstay of the Canberra Jewish community.

The planned expansion will bring it into the 21st century as a representative national centre for the Australian Jewish community as well as serving the growing Jewish community in Canberra. Plans include a new wing with a lecture hall and meetings rooms, space for a National Jewish Museum, a National Jewish Library, offices and meeting room for national Jewish organisations, a formal National Jewish War Memorial feature, outdoor event spaces and a playground.



Sylvia Deutsch OAM is a Vice-President of NCJWA and also national Chair of its Governance portfolio. She was for many years the Canberra correspondent for The Australian Jewish News and also worked in tertiary administration and research.

Book Report: The Family with Two Front Doors by Anna Ciddor

Anna Ciddor's latest Young Adult offering takes the reader on a gentle journey through the life of a Hasidic family in pre-War Poland. Don't think Anatevka. The Rabinovitch's live comfortably in 1920's Lublin in a well-appointed home. The author has revealed that the character of papa Rabinovitch was based on her own grandfather, the Rebbe of a Hasidic dynasty, who was well-supported by his adoring flock of followers. The novel comprises vignettes of the life of the family, woven together by the story of the impending marriage of the oldest daughter. The bride, Adina, age fifteen, is anxious about her unknown groom, but places her faith in her parents' choice.



The large family comprises Papa, Mama and nine children who each have well-formed personalities. The characters form an ensemble cast, each given his or her chance to shine. While the family is strictly observant, Miriam is somewhat rebellious and Yacov shows no sign of the studiousness expected of a Rabbi's son, each representing Jews who were eager to embrace a more modern existence than their community offered at that time. On a trip to the countryside, the anxiety felt by the family travelling away from their Jewish village hints at the precariousness of Jewish life in Poland and the horrors to come in the following decades. The book lacks any major conflicts or challenges in the story but it does offer to the general reader a revealing glimpse into Jewish life at that time. The Family with Two Front Doors is suitable for 10-15 year olds and is a charming and enjoyable story.

Sandra Gillis

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THE WOMEN'S SECTION



Image credit: Daughters of Zelophehad by Bonnie Lee Roth

As a Rabbi, I find it strange finding myself in the women's section rather than on the Bimah. Stranger still was fainting while on the Bimah in my first student pulpit! On that memorable Yom Kippur afternoon three decades earlier, the Treasurer asked "Are you pregnant?" as I came-to.

"I've...just... never fasted on my feet all day." Taking a deep breath, I returned to the lectern.

I could've been pregnant, being newlywed to my rabbinic student husband, but we hoped to finish studies before starting a family. Instead the marriage finished before ordination. Childless, divorced, not yet 30, I joined the first 200 women to live the life of a female rabbi. While friends became "Emah-on-the-Bimah," I wondered 'would I always carry Torah and never children? Could I have career and family?'

"I couldn't have both" Regina Jonas, history's first female Rabbi, told me across the decades. Ordained in 1935, Rabbi Jonas believed she had to choose. I'd hoped and prayed otherwise... Movement disrupted my thoughts as women stood up for the Shofar Service. Across the mechitzah, my son and I exchanged knowing smiles. Yeah, he's a blond Progressive-Jewish kid, but his "tekiah g'dolah" blows the tzit-tzit off other boys!

"You learned in utero!" I mouth to him as sweet memories materialise. I recall swaying before the open arc leading "Avinu-Malkenu" while patting my enormous belly. Between my tallit's wings, an 8 month baby-bump swelled under my white satin Holiday robes. Baby-to-be danced within to ancient prayers. Looking up, I noticed the Torah's shining breast-plate mirroring a bright white reflection of my very pregnant self! Wonder, gratitude and hope enveloped me and the tiny yet-to-be-born soul.

"Mummy!" my daughter's whisper brings me to my feet. A thundering "TEKIAH!" shakes the room. No wonder ancient Rabbis heard powerful cries of birthing echoed in the shofar's call: "99 while in labour, the 100th [a final tekiah g'dolah] with giving birth." (Midrash Tanchuma Parashat Emor 11; Rashi, Sefer HaPardes). Hugging my amazing daughter, I remember her birthing. My cells tingle again.

"Ha'yom Harat Ha'Olam" - "Today is the World's Conception Day" we sing after the shofar's call. The prayer hints at midrashic teachings that our Biblical Mothers Sarah, Rachel and Hannah all conceived on Rosh Hashanah (Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 29a). These foremothers journey from the Machzor into our lives every New Year ... but estranged Hagar visits first.

From a distance, Hagar gazes at my children sharing a tentative smile. Years before, she opened my eyes to hidden springs of hope in wildernesses of unexpected single-parenthood. "Thank you again, Hagar" says my heart.

Meanwhile, it seems Mother Sara is sitting with two women who are struggling with IVF. Might pamphlets on support groups and adoption peep over the top of Sara's machzor? Sara's lived the surrogacy choice and understands the complexity of creating families. I pray that she and Hagar will yet hear in the shofar a call to reconciliation.

Mother Rachel arrives during the Haftorah, weeping still for her lost children. I long to comfort her as she comforts me during Yizkor - when my heart aches for my miscarried baby - held in my womb, but never in my arms. "The Source takes them all back," Rachel reminds me each year, "mine, yours, all return to the womb of life - interconnected like us - to our mothers' mothers..."

Strange sitting in this women's section with much of womanhood behind me. Degrees earned. Chuppah lifted. Career attained. Pregnancies realised. Motherhood graced. Loving husband, finally found. Family growing until fledglings fly and leave an empty nest. I wonder about the empty nest.

"Might I join you?" an aged voice asks. "Mother Hannah-absolutely!" Her wisdom affords her radiance, complemented by silver hair and soft wrinkles. Hannah senses the uncertainties and yearnings flowing through my prayers. "Remember, open your heart to G-d and follow your soul's truth - no matter if others understand," Hannah encourages.

JNF WISHES YOU SHANA TOVA



Our Rosh Hashanah Blue Box campaign is up and running! Please donate at www.jnf.org.au or by calling 1300 563 563.



(Cont p14)

"Inconceivable blessings await in this year and those ahead; they'll find you unexpectedly. The more you welcome and share them, the more the Shechinah will shine...and so will you!"

I reach out to Hannah ... but she's vanished leaving only a yellowed page of Woman's Techina prayers in her place. I read: "For the merit of our Mothers, Hagar, Sara, Rachel and Hannah: grant me life and strength that I may serve you with upright, clean thoughts and a courageous, pure heart. May my portion be with the righteous women of this world and the next. Send angels of compassion to me and my dear ones. May we earn our livelihood with honour and give tzedakah generously doing mitzvos that bring you nachus, and may our prayers be as a crown upon your head."

"Thank you Hannah – thank you Mothers!" I whisper into my Machzor, strangely honoured to have found my place among the women.



Rabbi Sheryl Nosan-Lantzke, MAJE, MAHL, the founding Rabbi of Jewish Spirituality Australia, lives in Perth, Western Australia with her family.

DENIAL



In 1993 historian Deborah Lipstadt published *Denying the Holocaust: the Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. The book provided a history and analysis of the Holocaust denial movement. In the book she classified a number of people as holocaust deniers. Three years later, in 1996 David Irving, one of those identified as a holocaust denier, filed a case in the English courts accusing Lipstadt and her publisher of making libellous statements when she categorised him as a holocaust denier. In the English court system, the burden of proof rests not on the plaintiff but on the defendant. This meant that Lipstadt and Penguin publishing had to prove that the statements made about Irving were truthful. In order to do, so they used a three-pronged strategy which included: a) proving that the holocaust happened; b) documenting Irving's political affiliations; and c) examining Irving's work to see whether Irving had falsified historical records.

2016 marks the 20th anniversary of the filing of the case and sees the release of *Denial* - a film starring Rachel Weisz as Deborah Lipstadt and Timothy Spall as David Irving. The film traces the case and the battle between the two which played out in the media as well as the courtroom. The case was finally heard in 2000 during a five week judge only trial. In his 335 page judgement Justice Charles Gray found that Irving had "persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence" and "that he is an active Holocaust denier" thus ruling the judgement in favour of the defendants. The long arduous path taken by Lipstadt and her team of academics from around the world placed holocaust denial in the public consciousness and helped delegitimise the claims of deniers.

Danielle Jones - Resnik

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DEALING WITH CASUAL ANTISEMITISM



Antisemitism takes many forms, ranging from an off-hand offensive comment right through to genocide. Most official reports on antisemitism by Jewish organisations, and by others who monitor hate, cover incidents of antisemitism which include assault, verbal abuse, vandalism, graffiti, and the like. One form of antisemitism is rarely monitored - casual antisemitism.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission: "Casual racism is one form of racism. It refers to conduct involving negative stereotypes or prejudices about people on the basis of race, colour or ethnicity. Examples include jokes, offhanded comments and exclusion of people from social situations on the basis of race."

How should Jews deal with casual antisemitism when faced with it? Is it best to ignore it? Turn away, pretend not to have noticed? Or is it important to respond? If so, how?

Often, in the back of the mind of a person who is being subjected to casual racism, or who witnesses it, is a nagging fear of the possible consequences of responding. If we respond, will it make the situation worse? Will it engender vitriol or aggression? Or, will responding be dismissed with the assertion that we are being 'sensitive, defensive, paranoid' or unable to 'take a joke' or that we have 'taken things out of context'? Will we be humiliated or will we be vindicated?

These are the fears many of us have and they are legitimate fears. Some part of one's inner self whispers: "Don't create a scene. Don't rock the boat. Don't make trouble. Keep a low profile."

There are no hard and fast rules for dealing with casual antisemitism, whether one is the target or a witness. Whether one responds or not, and if so how, depends on all the circumstances, the nature of the offence, and of course on one's own personality and character.

A key circumstance is the physical setting in which the casual antisemitism

occurs - on the street, in a shop, in an educational institution (school or university), in the workplace, in social settings or in a private home.

In some settings, for example, at work, the power relationship may affect whether and how we respond. If we know the offender, is the casual antisemitism pre-meditated or spontaneous? Is it done through ignorance or malice? Does the offender not realise that the conduct is racist or is it apparent that the offender knows and intends that the conduct will be hurtful? Is the offender in the habit of behaving that way?

There are other factors that may determine whether or not we respond to casual racism, and if so, how. Are we alone or with others? Are we vulnerable, either at this moment or generally? Are there children present? Are there witnesses present who may assist if needed? Are there supportive friends on hand? Or will others join in and take the side of the offender? Will the offender appreciate that he has given offence and learn from your response? Is the offender likely to become verbally or physically aggressive? Is the offender under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Does he or she seem dangerous? Is the offender displaying antisemitic or other racist symbols, or possibly carrying a weapon? Can I get away quickly if need be, if things become uncomfortable or even dangerous?

In short, whether or not we respond to casual racism will often depend on our assessment of whether responding will escalate the situation or, alternatively, have the positive effect of enabling the offender to understand our concern and not repeating those remarks, or putting the offender on notice that such behaviour is unacceptable and that he/she will be called to account. Often the assessment needs to be made in a matter of moments and we can never be sure our assessment is accurate.

Julie Nathan



Julie Nathan is the Research Officer for the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, and a co-chair of the Antisemitism Portfolio of NCJWA.



Brie Shroot is a writer and activist, concerned with issues pertaining to women, feminism and Judaism. She is a member of the editorial team.

CASUAL SEXISM

Some friends recently shared stories with me. The first was speaking with a friend about a decision to cut her hair short, a man overheard the conversation and became angry with her. When she did not immediately change her mind and agree to keep her hair long, but rather questioned his right to an opinion, he became violent.

A second friend shared a story about being the only woman at a BBQ. The men in the space continuously questioned her right to be there, and made it clear that they had no memory of her despite having met her numerous times.

A third shared an experience of being made to feel uncomfortable walking down the street because her shoulders were uncovered. Another mentioned her manager at work constantly asking her to smile more. Finally, a friend shared that she was told that her latest promotion at work came about not because of her achievements, but because her manager has a crush on her.

Experiences like these are unfortunately not rare. They often pass by without us even thinking to comment on them. We don't like to think that so many of our experiences are coloured by sexism. We have been taught to look away rather than to provoke upset by pointing out double standards or unsavoury 'jokes'.

We live in a world where in Australia a website that allows and encourages young boys to share nude photos of young girls, naming the schools and communities these girls are from, was shut down temporarily, then reappeared. A world where a school that was listed on the site called all the girls together to tell them to stop taking photos and to change how they dressed, but did not call the boys to account. This despite the fact that it is clear that it is the boys who have been acting unlawfully and inappropriately targeting their schoolmates.

It is a world where the Orthodox Union (US) can call a working group on the status of women, and not even consider appointing a woman to the group or even invite men who are currently working with women in leadership roles. This is a world where we teach girls not to put themselves in a position of being raped, but don't tell boys that they should never ever engage in any act with a woman without explicit consent. It is a world where girls magazines and media extol the virtues of being pretty and passive, while media targeting boys encourages action and future planning.

Sometimes the only recourse offered to us when we experience the casual and systemic sexism that our society condones is to raise awareness, through websites like the Everyday Sexism Project or by sharing our own experiences with our own networks. When we recognise the toll these interactions have on us we are better able to care for ourselves. We can also call the men in our lives to account when they make casual statements and jokes, let them know that we will not stand for this and that we expect better.

Brie Shroot

Brisbane



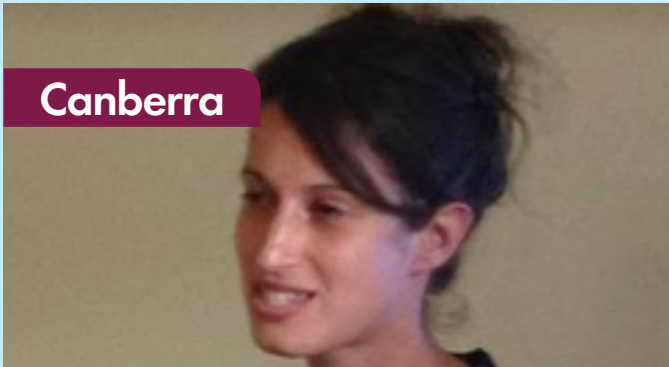
Book Talk with Barbara Kamler, an American now living in Melbourne who wrote her prose book 'Leaving New Jersey'. L-R Janine Arenson, Rina Sorenson, Shlomit Bleiberg, Ayalet Rinon

Brisbane



Book Talk with Barbara Kamler, who was very entertaining in reading some of the stories from her book. She spoke about each one before reading it. Barbara Kamler (R) with Haley Parson and Lauren Daniels

Canberra



Habit Cherni from IsraAid and Kelila Slonim were the speakers at Canberra's annual Membership drive and afternoon tea, held in April. Habit Cheni from IsraAid speaking about NCJWA's Israel Projects

Canberra



NCJWA is a major supporter of the Canberra community's bid to raise funds for a new National Jewish Community Centre. Here are Canberra Jewish community members at the ACT Jewish community capital campaign launch.

Gold Coast



Over 70 people came to hear Mr Jeremy Jones speak on the effect of the Shoah today and into the future. Yom Hashoah: L-R Jason Steinberg, Barbara Stewart-Kann OAM, Jeremy Jones AM, Director of International & Community Affairs, Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council.

NSW



This year MUM FOR MUM held a Mother's day event with a Cooking demonstration by Neil Gottheiner L-R Nadene Alhadeff, Jessica Newman, Merle Ware, Neil Gottheiner, Barbara Shotland, Ruth Osen, Camilla Newman, Anne Reid OAM

NSW



NSW held its AGM on 20 June, with State Attorney General and Member for Vacluse, Gabrielle Upton MP. L-R Ruth Osen, Josephine Holland, Miriam Levy, Janet Merkur, Maxine Bachmayer, Anne Reid OAM, Gabrielle Upton MP, Miri Orden, Victoria Nadel, Mandi Chonowitz-Jacobson, Isabelle Shapiro OAM (Absent- Barbara Shotland)

NSW



A number of special awards were presented at NSW's AGM: L-R Rebbetzin Hinda Young, Isabelle Shapiro OAM, Mandi Chonowitz-Jacobson



NCJWA NSW sponsored a community panel with a discussion on 'What place is there for gays and lesbians in the Jewish Community? Are LGBTI people welcome?' This event was inspired by previous NCJWA support for the 'No to Homophobia Campaign'. L-R Brandon Srot, Rabbi Dr Ben Elton, Justin Koonin, Dawn Cohen, Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio, Vic Alhadeff



NCJWA(Vic) recently launched a Jewish Women's Legal Network at a cocktail event with guest speakers County Court Judge Sandy Davis, and family lawyer Talya Faigenbaum. The purpose will be to bring together Jewish women in the legal profession to share ideas, learning from one another's experiences and developing a support network specifically for Jewish women in the legal profession. L-R Dara Isaacson, Sandy Davis, Talya Faigenbaum, Lee Ann Bassier



The Unchain My Heart Committee recently held a private screening with producer Tracey Spring, of ABC TV's COMPASS - Divorce According To God Episode 1: 'Set Me Free'. This looked at the heartbreaking situation for Agunot, 'chained women'. L-R Susie Ivany, Tracey Spring, Annette Sweet



The Brainfood Series recently hosted Ephraim Finch who spoke about how a young boy from a Sydney family of butchers became the Executive Director of the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha. L-R Shirley Glance, Ephraim Finch, Sharron Singer



We would like to thank Tari Miller Mazal Tov on her Batmitvah. In lieu of gifts Tari requested guests donate books to our Caring Mums program. Thank you Tari, the books will certainly delight the new bubs. L-R Tari Miller, Lee Ann Bassier



An information session was held on Gynaecological Cancers in June with the aim of bringing women together in our community to add to awareness for prevention and treatment. First speaker was Anna Kraszewski from the Australia and New Zealand Gynaecological Group, who spoke about current research. Our second speaker was Kath Mazzella OAM, a cancer survivor, who has established GAIN (Gynae Awareness Information Network) and initiated an International Gynae Awareness Day which was held on 12 September. L-R: Jenny Faigenbaum, Kath Mazzella OAM, Anna Kraszewski, Shelley London



Jade Katz, the WA AUJS President was our guest speaker at the 2016 WA AGM. She is an inspiring young woman, and talked about her engagement with the AUJS leadership and her plans for WA AUJS for this year. We wish her the very best with the challenges ahead of her. L-R Ester Steingiesser, Jade Katz



Valerie Scott was the speaker at a recent meeting of WA's Natanya Group. She held their members enthralled by relating her experiences when she used to live in Bangalore and Mysore in India. L - R: Margaret Helfgott, Valerie Scott, Valerie Frank Photo by Louise Wingsen

GARDEN CLASS AT THE GIL RABIN SCHOOL



The establishment of a Garden Classroom at the Gil Rabin School is a joint project of NCJWA and JNF. The project commenced in September 2015 and the basic garden infrastructure was completed in early 2016. Teachers have already begun to hold outdoor lessons in the garden, including maths and science.

The Gil Rabin School is located in S'derot on the border with Gaza, an area which is subject to ongoing rocket attacks.

UPCOMING NCJWA EVENTS

Brisbane

- Tuesday 1 November- Melbourne Cup Day event
- Date TBA- 70's night.

Canberra

- Sunday 6 November - Supper Movie night
- Sunday 27 November - Founder's Day

NSW

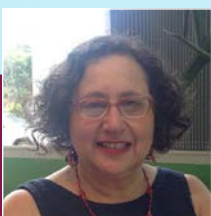
- Date TBA- Pink Sunday- Jewish Breast Cancer Network Event
- Monday 7 November - NCJWA Cancer Support Network
- Wednesday 9 November- 9th Mum for Mum Cocktail Party & Silent Auction
- Date TBA- Progressive Group Movie
- Tuesday 29 November- Celebrating Israel
- Monday 5 December- NCJWA Cancer Support Network
- Monday 5 December-Founders Day Event / Rebbetzin Jana Gottshall Memorial Library with poet and translator Agnes Silberstein.

Victoria

- Thursday 27 October- BrainFood: Barbra Kamler 'Leaving New Jersey'
- Wednesday 16 November- BrainFood: 'Introduction to Healthy Clean Living', Keren Slutzkin
- Wednesday 23 November- Spring Luncheon with guest speaker Dai Le
- Wednesday 30 November - BrainFood: Goldie Alexander 'Mentoring Your Memoir And Other Stories'
- December TBA - JamFest
- Sunday 11 December- Human Rights & Founders Day
- February 2017 TBA- NCJWA Victoria 90th Anniversary Launch
- Wednesday 15 February 2017- BrainFood: Ngare Hobbins 'Eat to Cheat Aging & Dementia'
- Tuesday 14 March 2017- BrainFood: 'Drug & Alcohol Rehabilitation' Angela King
- Thursday 30 March 2017 - BrainFood: Joanne Dannon- 'Falling for Mr Wrong'
- Thursday 25 May 2017 -Women to Watch Dinner

Western Australia

- Sunday 30 October - Jewish Film Festival 'Denial'



Andrea Cooper is a professional communications consultant. Her current work involves developing approaches for communications inclusion to reach audiences with sensory cognitive disability, from diverse cultures &/ with low English literacy. She is also a consumer advocate and passionate about Judaism and our community.



A CELEBRATION FOR WOMEN

Rosh Chodesh, New Moon. I began to wonder why Jews celebrate the new moon and not the full moon, when light is at its greatest.

On a pragmatic note, we know that the Hebrew calendar is a lunar-solar calendar, which includes in its calculations both the cycle of the moon as it revolves around the earth as well as the movement of the sun. For that reason, knowing when the new moon occurs is critical.

In biblical and early rabbinic times, the new moon wasn't fixed by astronomical calculations. Instead, after the new moon was sighted, the emergence of its first light, and witnesses had testified to this fact, someone would go to the top of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem with a long pole of wood. He would set the end of his pole on fire and wave it around until he could see someone on another hilltop waving his pole. The second person waved his pole until he could see a third person waving, and so on until the message reached from Jerusalem to Babylonia.

According to the Mishnah, in the time of the Second Temple, the Samaritans, counted months differently from the Jews and lit their beacon fires not according to the observable new moon but strictly by counting sets of 30 days. Their signal fires confused the Jews (possibly deliberately), interfering with the shared practice that they strove to create. Not to be deterred, the Jews sent messengers instead. They continued to mark the days and holidays together, from Jerusalem to Babylonia, offering blessings and sharing in the same stories.

To calculate our months and holidays, we see when the new moon appears and then we count forward.

Rabbi Yochanan taught: "Whoever blesses the new moon at the proper time is considered as having welcomed the Presence of the Shechinah" (Babylonian Talmud, Sandhedrin 42a). Sanctifying time, which is infinite, is an expression of sanctifying God, who is Eternal.

So why celebrate the beginning of the month? The real celebration, (Numbers 10 & 28) comes when the sky is mostly shrouded in darkness. Why? When the first sliver of light is noticeable to the human eye, fears are replaced with newfound hope. This is the moment worthy of celebration. This is the moment when potential-within and without-is revealed and must be sanctified.

The Mishnah's description of the intricate ritual for declaring the new moon teaches us that we must always be on the lookout for new light and for potential growth. The mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon instructs us to be optimistic, to anticipate that renewed light will come our way. We are to expect it, to yearn for it, to trust that it will come-sooner or later. And when it does, we are to praise God who is with us in the darkness as in light.

Rosh Chodesh is a mechanism through which we create shared meaning. Our festivals are not meant to be marked alone. Judaism honours individual spirituality and personal relationships with God, but it thrives when we come together, engaging in the same rituals at the same time, imbuing them with the narratives and interpretations. Through the stories we tell each other about our shared symbols, we change those symbols and ourselves and even our understanding of God:

But why the focus on women's groups? According to an ancient tradition, the holiday was a reward given to the women of Israel because they refused to surrender their jewellery for the creation of the golden calf (Exodus 32). Because of our righteousness, women are exonerated from working on Rosh Chodesh.

Since the 1970s, women have been marking Rosh Chodesh as a time for prayer and study. Forming Rosh Chodesh groups, meeting monthly, joining in song and prayer. Groups have focused on healing liturgies, on the study of Torah, or on liturgies written by women or that speak to women's experiences. Many groups have been meeting regularly for years and have become a great source of spirituality and strength for their members.

A number of synagogues offer Rosh Chodesh meetings for the women in our community. I've never been one for segregation of the genders, not ever, but now I understand why this group is for our female members only. If you've never been, come and see for yourself.



Dorothy Graff has been Chairperson and Vice President at Temple Beth Israel, Melbourne, and is now a very active Board member involved in many sub committees. She loves to learn and share the fruit of her learning.



EDITORIAL

I am often asked about what it is to be a Jewish feminist. So, through the pages of this journal, I and my editorial team seek to raise the full array of issues for Jewish feminists – from what it means to be a Jewish woman to questions about women's place and our experience of Jewish religious practice. We feel that as Jewish women, every aspect of social justice affecting women is our concern (be it, gender discrimination, racism, the treatment of refugees or trafficking). We don't shy away from the reality of misogyny and sexual violence and questions of how these are reproduced (through advertising, the web and in communities). We also consider the uniquely Jewish form of sexual violence that is involved in decisions of women who leave abusive husbands, seek Jewish divorces (*the Get*) and become agunot (chained women).

As women who are Jews, every aspect of being Jewish that affects women is our concern. This includes ritual and ritual practice, as well as participation within the Jewish community and community leadership. We take seriously, and therefore advocate for, equal representation on any speaking panel in the community. We look at women

making a difference in the community – which is, after all, the objective of NCJWA. We look at how the Jewish religion can be empowering or exclusionary; at the role of education and at women carving out spaces within Synagogues and Jewish life.

For the first time, there is a column in the Bulletin that addresses your questions about Jewish feminism directly. We canvass a range of Jewish feminists to tell us about their views of Jewish feminism. This supplements the stories contained herein and the survey currently being conducted by the Marilyn Gross and Negba Weiss-Dolev (Status of Women portfolio) – which I encourage you to find and complete on our website.

So we begin another year. We wish you a happy and healthy year, and that you go from strength to strength in your work towards repairing the world.

..Shana tova,

Melinda Jones & the Editorial Team (Andrea Cooper, Brie Shroot and Danielle Jones-Resnik).



THE LAST WORD

What is the purpose of time? Through time we sanctify. Through the New Year, we are renewed. We interrupt what may seem like the sameness of our everyday life with the wake-up call of the shofar. Each moment is an opportunity for renewal and sanctification. This is our life. No one is going to live it for us. Now is the time.

May we use our meeting with our mortality to propel us towards the life that is worth living. That life is made up of many moments worth living. Many moments in which we can bring the fullness of who we are. Many moments in which we can listen to our magnificent information systems and give expression in the world to our deepest gifts and yearning. Through the expression of the love of who we are, we are transformed and we touch others - near and far.

May our hearts be renewed so that we can pick up the places where we have given up on ourselves and on others, and on the world.

May our lips be renewed so that we can speak of You and each other with praise and gratitude.

May our eyes be renewed so that we can see the magical, mysterious, blessed and sublime beauty in those closest to us, and farthest from us.

May we use the fullness of our whole beings to serve You in love.



Rabba Dr Melanie Landau is the first female Australian Orthodox Rabbi. She is a Graduate of Yeshivat Maharat and is currently serving as the Director of Leadership Programs for Encounter, a leading conflict transformation educational organisation with offices in Jerusalem and New York.

For further information on any of these Events, or Contacts in any other NCJWA Sections please look online at www.ncjwa.org.au or phone our National office on 03 9523 0537

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