



# THE FANYA GOTTESFELD HELLER CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN IN JUDAISM

## *From our Director*



### *Dear Friends,*

A very exciting year has just ended at the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism. It is a great pleasure to inform you about our events. Thanks to a generous additional contribution by the Heller family, we were able to significantly expand the scale of activities we sponsored. A major goal was to increase our visibility on campus, both among faculty and students. In order to achieve this objective, we held many conferences and events on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from gender and Jewish philosophy, to Haredi women in Israel. These events were well-attended and received wide coverage in the local media as well. Details of these conferences are featured in the pages that follow. Several conferences are currently being planned for next year, including a two-day international conference on Women, Family, and Work in Israeli Society.

In addition to public events, we increased our involvement in student life on campus, sponsoring two plays together with the Rackman Center. Both plays focused on domestic abuse and sexual harassment. As part of our conference on Women and Prayer, we also held workshops in which many students participated. In addition, we have devoted considerable resources to supporting graduate students and faculty engaged in research on topics relevant to the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center's mandate. We held two competitions for graduate students, one awarding eight prizes to support Masters and Doctoral work, and the second providing five students with funding for travel, either to international conferences or for archival research. We hope to be able to continue providing this kind of support in the future as well.

Another area in which we have enjoyed success this year is in the fostering of partnerships with other centers and organizations both in Israel and abroad. We are now active participants in the publication of **Massekhet**, Matan's bi-annual journal. We co-hosted conferences with a number of other bodies, including the Gewurtz Center for Gender Studies at Bar-Ilan and the Yediot Aharonot Press. Many other projects are described in the pages that follow.

Last fall, I temporarily replaced Professor Tova Cohen as Director of the Center. It is with great pleasure that I now assume this position officially. Ms. Rivka Hindin, our Coordinator, has returned from her maternity leave and we both look forward to working together during the coming year. As always, we welcome suggestions and feedback from the Center's friends. We hope to see you at our events.

Wishing you a wonderful year of happiness and learning,

*Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten*



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# *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller MA and PhD 2007 Prizes*

This year, the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center held a competition for prizes that provided support for the best MA and PhD candidates in various fields whose work directly related to Women in Judaism. The review committee consisted of Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten (Jewish History, Gender Studies), Dr. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari (Law), Dr. Ronit Kark (Sociology, Psychology), and Dr. Lilach Rosenfeld-Friedman (Land of Israel Studies).



Reshaping the Immigration Experience and Identity in Hanna Szenes' Personal Writing (MA, Gender Studies Program)

**רותי גליק**  
Ruti Glick



Rabbi Ben Zion Meir Hai Ouziel's Halakhic Approach to Family Law (PhD, Faculty of Law)

**נעמה סט**  
Naama Sat



Night in the Middle Ages in Ashkenaz (PhD, Department of Jewish History)

**ענת קוטנר**  
Anat Kutner



Bereavement and Gender in Memorial Books for the Casualties of Israel's War of Independence (MA, Land of Israel Studies)

**אפרת זקברך**  
Efrat Seckbach



Hebrew Woman to the Flag!: Military Service of Jewish Women from Palestine in the British Forces in WWII—National and Gender Perspectives (PhD, Land of Israel Studies)

**ענת גרנית-הכהן**  
Anat Granit-HaCohen



Motherhood, Nationality and Identity: A Comparison Between Two Bereaved Mothers, Rivka Guver and Manuela Dviri (MA, Gender Studies Program)

**דורית יוסף**  
Dorit Yosef



Gender Relations in "Hashomer" Organization and in Kefar-Giladi, 1909-1939 (PhD, Land of Israel Studies)

**סמדר סיני**  
Smadar Sinai



Women as Legal Functionaries in the Halakhic Legal System: An Historical and Jurisprudential Analysis (PhD, Department of Jewish History)

**אילן פוקס**  
Ilan Fuchs

# Conference in Honor of Professor Tamar Ross



On January 3rd, 2007 more than one hundred and fifty people joined the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism along with the Gewurtz Center

for Gender Studies, the Philosophy Department and the Midrasha LeNashim to honor Professor Tamar Ross who is retiring this year.

The conference took place in the Feldman building where speakers spoke to a full audience of friends, family, former students and colleagues. There was much praise for Professor Ross who has

been teaching in Bar-Ilan for many years. During her academic career she published over fifty articles in various scholarly journals and lectured widely at various institutions in Israel and abroad. One touching moment at the conference was an introduction given by Rabbi Yitzhak Kraus, who collected warm remarks from several of Prof. Ross's students and shared them with the audience.

The conference incorporated speakers from Prof. Ross's major areas of concentration, the Mussar Movement, Rav Kook and Contemporary Judaism, and Jewish Theology and Feminism.

Prof. Tamar Ross's very popular book **Expanding the Palace of Torah** (UPNE, 2004), was published with the support of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism.



## Discourse and Gender in Israel

The first interdisciplinary conference on Discourse and Gender in Israel took place at Bar-Ilan University on January 24th and 25th, 2007. The conference was organized by Dr. Malka Muchnik from the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Languages, Dr. Bryna Bogoch from the Department of Political Studies and the Interdisciplinary Department of

Social Studies, Dr. Orly Benjamin from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Prof. Tova Cohen, Head of the Gender Studies Program, and Prof. Ora Schwarzwald, Head of the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Languages and President of the Israeli Association for the Research of Language and Society; all are from Bar-Ilan University.

The conference was sponsored by the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism, the Faculty of Judaic Studies, the Vice-President's Office for Research, the Interdisciplinary Department of Social Studies, the Faculty of Law, and the Israeli Association for the Research of Language and Society.

The aim of the conference was to provide a forum for presentation of research about feminist and gender discourses, focusing on the language by and about women in a variety of social and cultural contexts. It engaged scholars who have studied women's discourse from diverse fields, such as legal texts, mass communication, educational and religious

texts, literature, and film-and those who have examined the potential of language to challenge and transform gender relations.

The conference brought together some of the most prominent researchers from different academic institutions in Israel as well as younger scholars and promising doctoral students. They presented seventy-five lectures from a variety of disciplines, and provided the opportunity for an exchange of ideas and information, which are of benefit to both scholars and social activists. Moreover, three invited experts from abroad presented the plenary lectures – Prof. Suzanne Romaine from the University of Oxford, Prof. Mercedes Bengoechea from the University of Alcalá de Henares in Madrid, and Prof. Helga Kotthoff from the University of Freiburg.

The feedback from the conference was overwhelmingly positive, and the participants were very enthusiastic and expressed their wish for continuity. Moreover, the conference attracted the media interest and there was wide coverage of it. A few articles were published in different newspapers, and some of the researchers were interviewed on radio programs. We expect that discourse and gender will become a focus of debate on the public agenda.





## Major Conference on Women and Prayer at Bar Ilan

On March 18th, 2007, the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center held a conference devoted to women praying and women's prayer. This day was organized together with Dr. Aliza Lavie, of the Dept. of Communications at Bar-Ilan and author of the best-selling book **Tefilat Nashim**. The conference included a combination of approaches and perspectives on the topic. The day started off with two academic sessions devoted to women's prayers and women praying throughout history with talks by Prof. Moshe Rosman, Prof. Hava Turniansky, Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten, Dr. Vered Noam and Prof. Rachel Elijor.

Prof. Rosman presented a panoramic overview of changes in synagogue structures and women's roles in prayers over the past four hundred years in Ashkenazi communities. Prof. Turniansky discussed praying in the context of Glückel of Hamel's life. Glückel is the first Jewish woman who wrote an autobiography. The talks by Dr. Noam, Dr. Baumgarten and Prof. Elijor all touched upon historical discussions of women's halakhic obligation to pray, and on the contents of women's prayers in different times and places. All the speakers discussed different methods of reading traditional sources to help find information on women and prayer that has been ignored or disregarded to date.

The afternoon was dedicated to six parallel workshops that discussed and demonstrated non-traditional methods of prayer, psychological analysis and the composition of prayers.

We concluded with a panel led by Dr. Lavie in which three different perspectives on Israeli society and praying were presented by Rabbi Yuval Sherlo, Malka Pewterkovsky and Dr. Alon Gal. Rabbi Sherlo discussed the tension between private petitions and obligatory prayers and gender differences in this context; Pewterkovsky spoke about the contents and dilemmas that occupy women in today's religious world when discussing praying and Dr. Gal demonstrated how non-orthodox groups in Israel have adapted and adopted traditional prayers for new uses. The panel led to much controversy, both among the speakers and the audience, and generated a lively discussion.



The day was attended by faculty, students and outside participants as well as by a religious army unit. The heterogeneity of the audience contributed to the interesting discussions and the success of the conference. In the wake of the event, we hope to hold future days of study with additional army units as well as the students of the pre and post army women's learning programs. We see these groups of women as important sectors to expose to questions concerning the place of women in traditional and modern Judaism. (Photo Credit: Pnina Geffen)

## Private Mother, National Mother: Motherhood in Pre-State Israel



The annual conference in memory of Prof. Dafna Israeli was held at Bar-Ilan University on the 28th of February. The organizing committee consisted of Prof. Margalit Shilo, Dr. Lilach Rosenberg and Smadar Sinai, from the Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archeology, and Dr. Tammy Razi, from the Gender Studies Program. The conference was sponsored by the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism, the Gender Studies Program and the Land of Israel Studies Department.

The entire conference was dedicated to discussing various aspects of mothering and motherhood during the "Yishuv" (pre-state Israel) period. The four sessions and fifteen papers presented introduced an abundance of new and extremely varied studies focusing on issues and perspectives such as case studies of different role

models of motherhood, both concrete and metaphoric, of well-known public figures during this time period such as Henrietta Szold and Mania Shohat. Studies of concepts of mothering and symbols of motherhood, both in the collective agrarian society of the "Kibutzim", and the urban society, mainly in Tel-Aviv, were presented, as well as studies of different aspects of motherhood and nationality, such as the service of Jewish mothers in the British Forces during WWII.

Although the lectures introduced varied topics, theoretical perspectives and methodologies, they also shared several common themes. These related to the ambivalent status of women in the Zionist project, the ongoing tension between collective-nationalistic demands and private lives, and the paradoxical nature of motherhood, specifically, and the family institution in general, in revolutionary societies. Many of the lectures exposed the discrepancy between the Zionist-Socialist discourse of gender equality, and a reality of the marginalization of women, and feminine experiences, both in the "Yishuv" period itself, and in the historiography of the era.

## Unique Conference on Israeli Haredi Women



On June 12, 2007, we held a scholarly conference on various aspects of the experiences,

dilemmas, images, realities, and challenges of Israeli Haredi women. This conference, the first on the topic ever held in Israeli academia, began with a key-note presentation by Professor Tamar El-Or of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and was followed by three sessions, each of which included several presentations.

The speakers represented a wide range of disciplines, such as history (Sharon Geva on Pesia Shershevsky), literature (Yael Shenker and Malka Schaps on women's literature), geography (Lee Cahaner on women in the new Haredi cities), communications (Ruth Ebenstein and Rivka Neria Ben-Shahar on women



in the Haredi press), and medicine (Esther Straus on the struggle with breast cancer). They presented new questions, findings, and analyses based upon the research that they conducted. These challenging presentations sparked numerous discussions and critiques during the sessions of the conference as well as afterwards. The audience included men and women, Haredim and non-Haredim, graduate students as well as senior scholars; this variety contributed



considerably to the quality of the discussions. The conference was co-sponsored by the Program in Contemporary Jewry. Dr. Kimmy Caplan of the Dept. of Jewish History headed the academic committee, which included Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten, Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz and Dr. Yael Shenkar. The event was a huge success.

## Evening in Honor of "Voice of A Hebrew Maiden"

On June 20th, the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center held a festive end of the year event, together with the Gender Studies Program. The first part of the evening honored the eight graduate students who won the prestigious Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center research prizes this past year. All of the students attended and received their awards. Efrat Seckbach spoke on behalf of all the recipients. Her paper "Bereavement and Gender in Memorial Books for the Casualties of Israel's War of Independence", was well received.

The second part of the evening was devoted to the recent publication of Prof. Tova Cohen and Prof. Shmuel Feiner's book **Voice of A Hebrew Maiden: Women's Writings of the 19th Century Haskalah Movement**. The publication of the book was made possible by a grant from the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center. This book is an anthology of Hebrew texts written by women in the nineteenth century in Western and Eastern Europe, which reveal the intense involvement of young Jewish women in the Haskalah movement, a phenomenon that has almost been ignored to date.

The texts in the book, together with the authors' introduction, reveal a large body of literature that will be the basis for many studies in the future. Dr. Natalie Goldberg (Bar-Ilan University) discussed the Eastern European texts in the book and compared them to Jewish women's intellectual and literary activity in Germany, during the same period, pointing to differences between geographical and cultural surroundings. Prof. Chana Naveh (Tel Aviv University) discussed the book and analyzed a number of short excerpts, outlining the special concerns of the young women who wrote in Hebrew, and the challenges they faced when trying to take part in what was a male intellectual environment. Prof. Cohen responded to the speakers and shared her thoughts on the texts in the book and their significance for understanding women's education and cultural identity during this period. The evening was a wonderful end to a very exciting and eventful year.



## 2007 Graduate Workshops

### Workshop with Prof. Rachel Adler

On January 4th, the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center held a graduate workshop with Prof. Rachel Adler, who was our guest for the conference in honor of Prof. Tamar Ross. Prof. Adler teaches at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, and is the author of the highly acclaimed **Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics** (JPS, 1998). Prof. Adler heard five graduate students from Bar-Ilan University and Tel Aviv University present their theses, and responded to each presentation with questions and suggestions. The meeting also provided an opportunity for graduate students from



different institutions working on similar topics to meet and discuss their work.

### Workshop with Prof. Caroline Bynum

The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism, together with the Israel Historical Society, co-sponsored a graduate workshop on Gender in the Middle Ages. The workshop took place on May 6th, 2007, at the Historical Society in Jerusalem, and hosted Prof. Caroline W. Bynum of the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton. Prof. Bynum is one of the most outstanding medievalists

studying Western Europe in the Middle Ages and a pioneer in the field of gender and medieval history. Her well-known prize winning books **Holy Feast and Holy Fast** and **Fragmentation and Redemption** have become classics in the field.

At the workshop, close to twenty-five graduate students from all Israeli universities gathered together. Presentations were made by two students: Avital Davidovitch-Eshed of Tel Aviv University, who spoke on "Mekadshot Hashem: The Representation of Women in the Hebrew Texts of the Crusade", and Margo Stroumsa-Uzan of Beer Sheva University who spoke on "Women Praying: Devotional Books for the Laity in Northern France 1275-1325". Prof. Bynum responded to each presentation and all the students participated in a discussion that followed. Prof. Michael Heyd (Hebrew University), chair of the Historical Society, opened the meeting and Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten was the moderator.



## Travel Grants 2007

Rachel Hillel, a Sociology & Anthropology doctoral student at Bar-Ilan University is currently researching the cultural and social terms of the rise of Anti-Aging Medicine in Israeli society. Hillel will be joining the HBI (Hadassah Brandeis Institute) this summer, to carry out the US portion of a current research project, looking at how mothers transmit health information to their daughters. The project is titled: "The Inter-Generational Transfer of Women's Health Behaviors Among Jewish American Women", and is headed by Dr. Julie Cwikel, the founder and director of the Center for Women's Health Studies.

This project is a continuation of a comprehensive piece of research she has conducted over the last four years, consisting of mother-daughter interviews and focus groups among Israeli women from six ethnic groups. The interviews explore how women learn about critical health behaviors in their lives, including menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and maintaining health and mental health.



# Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Publication Grants 2007

## New Book by Prof. Tamar Ross

Tamar Ross's **Expanding the Palace of Torah** (Am-Oved) was released in Hebrew at the beginning of April. The book offers a broad philosophical overview of the challenges the feminist revolution poses to Orthodox Judaism, and Orthodox Judaism's response to those challenges. Writing as an insider, Ross confronts the radical feminist critique of Judaism as a religion deeply entrenched in patriarchy. She sees this critique as threatening the theological heart of traditional Judaism – the belief in divine revelation.



Ross seeks to develop a theological response that fully acknowledges the male bias of Judaism's sanctified texts, yet provides a rationale for transformation of the relative

import and significance of that bias in today's world. Uncovering aspects of Jewish tradition that support this response, Ross proposes an approach to divine revelation, which she calls "cumulativism". This approach is based on a conflating of strict boundaries between text and its interpretation, or divine intent and the evolution of human understanding. Emphasizing that continuity with tradition can be maintained only when the halakhic system is understood as a living organism that grows via affirmation of its historical legacy and respect for its constraints, her book shows that the feminist revolution in Orthodox Judaism reaches beyond its practical effect upon individual lives to teach us something more profound about the nature of religious practice in general.

## New Book by Prof. Tova Cohen and Prof. Shmuel Feiner

The recent successful publication of the important book **Voice of A Hebrew Maiden: Women's Writings of the 19th Century Haskala Movement** (Kibbutz HaMeuhad, 2007), by Prof. Tova Cohen and Prof. Shmuel Feiner was made possible through the support of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center. This book is an anthology of Hebrew texts written by women in the nineteenth century in Western and especially Eastern Europe, which reveal the intense involvement of young Jewish women in the



Haskalah movement, a phenomenon that has almost been ignored to date.

The texts in the book, together with the authors' introduction reveal a large body of literature that will be the basis for many studies in the future. The book was published as part of the series **migdarim**, a series sponsored by the Kibbutz HaMeuhad. Many important books on gender have appeared in Hebrew since the series' foundation.

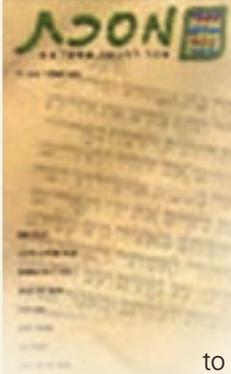
## New Book by Nitza Keren

Keren's book **Like a Sheet in the Hand of the Embroideress – Women Writers and the Hegemonic Text** (Bar-Ilan University Press), offers a close feminist reading of contemporary Israeli women's literature based on current post-modernist, post-structuralist and post-colonial theories. It is based on a PhD thesis written under the direction of Professor Tova Cohen, head of the Gender Studies Program, Bar-Ilan University (2004). Novels and short stories written by Amalia Kahana-Carmon, Hanna Bat-Shahar, Michal Govrin, Ronit Matalon, Dorit Peleg and Rivka Rass are analyzed according

to deconstructive theories as texture. Approached from a feminist standpoint, the focus moves from the embroiderer – the creator of the world according to the old liturgical text (which serves here as a motto) to the embroideress, who uses the needle as a subversive tool.



## Massekhet



Over the past year we have intensified and formalized our connection with Massekhet, a Journal of Jewish Studies in memory of Esther Auman, published by Matan in Jerusalem. This bi-annual journal publishes scholarly and popular articles that focus on women and Judaism, most of which are written by female scholars at different stages of their academic careers. This publication is intended to clarify common issues, historical aspects and methodological queries relating to women and Judaism. The intention of Massekhet is to include women in the study and creativity of research, and to further encourage current research relating to the image and the place of women in Judaism.

The most recent volume of Massekhet (vol. 6, Winter 2007) includes at least ten in-depth articles as well as abstracts in English on the topics of leaders and leadership, divorce, and Book Reviews. Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten, Director of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism, recently had her book **Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in the Medieval Europe** reviewed in Massekhet.

At the request of Matan, we have become active in both the production and promotion of the journal. Prof. Tova Cohen has joined the academic advisory board and Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten is now part of the editorial committee. We hope to continue to enjoy this cooperation!



## Upcoming Events

We have many activities planned for the upcoming 5768 year. This past year we expanded our activities and our support far beyond our expectations, and we hope to continue to grow.

Our major project for the upcoming year is an international conference in coordination with the Gender Studies Program and the Department of Sociology, on Women, Family and Work in Israeli Society. It will take place in March. In addition, we have planned conferences with the Israel Historical Society and other events with the Gender Studies Program, as well as numerous activities on campus. We will also be participating in a conference at Brandeis University in the spring. We will update you on all these events during the fall.

If you wish to join our email list please contact Rivka Hindin at [jwmn@mail.biu.ac.il](mailto:jwmn@mail.biu.ac.il)

In addition to conferences, we are updating our website ([www.biu.ac.il/js/jwmn](http://www.biu.ac.il/js/jwmn)) and we hope to upload many papers and relevant material as the year progresses. Look for our continued publication of the series "Women and Judaism", and our travel grant and research grant initiatives.

We look forward to seeing you at our exciting events this year!



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