שסת תשתסע מצועשל

For Full Health Care

The Commission for Women's Equality of the American Jewish Congress (AJC) on Jan. 21 issued a statement of continued support for the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision affirming a woman's right to abortion, and called for a national health reform program incorporating full coverage for women's reproductive health care. On the 21st anniversary of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, Ann F. Lewis, Chair of the Commission, said, "The American Jewish Congress reaffirms its unwavering support for the Supreme Court's decisions which recognize that the Constitution guarantees women's fundamental right to reproductive freedom. Our support for these decisions is fully consistent with Jewish tradition, which, while treating abortion as a serious moral issue, recognizes that there are circumstances in which the woman's well-being takes precedence over that of the fetus. This view reflects no lack of reverence for life. It is based on the belief that life can be diminished and desecrated by callousness and insensitivity to the unborn, however precious their promise. This reverence for life and opposition to violence so integral to our tradition renders particularly abhorrent the recent harassment and bombing of abortion clinics and the murder of Dr. David Gunn last year. . . .

The AJC's Commission for Women's Equality is initiating a lobbying campaign to advocate health care policies which include a women's health agenda.

Fighting Sexual Harassment

In the January/February *Tikkun*, Carmela Ingwer, a Chicago teacher of Judaica and Hebrew, argues for the development of a Jewish, Torah-based critique of

sexual harassment which would be integrated into Jewish education curricula: "only when a meaningful link is established between the Judaism taught in the classroom and the most vital of real-life concerns facing young Jews can Judaism re-engage its spiritual staying power. In an era in which sexual self-concept is often excruciatingly complex and controversial, and too many young men are still socialized to objectify women, a lively Judaic discourse on sexual harassment in Jewish classrooms would be one way to establish that link" (p. 53).

Ingwer draws upon seminal texts in Torah to illustrate that respect for women is inherent in religious Jewish life. She quotes from Genesis 1:27: "God created humanity in his own image. . .; male and female did he create them." Her interpretation follows: "Flowing from this bedrock are the numerous precepts to honor and preserve the dignity of hazulat —the other. Defiance of these precepts is a violation of the Divine image, a scoffing at God's will" (p. 54). Utilizing these and other teachings, Ingwer suggests that the Jewish community can effectively address such troubling issues as Jewish misogyny (manifested in the stereotype of the JAP), and develop a vehicle for empowering Jewish girls and women to fight against sexual harassment. Secular Jews, of course, can oppose harassment without reliance on religious texts.

On Women's Empowerment

Great-granddaughter of an anarchist and granddaughter of a women's health activist, Naomi Wolf's credentials for feminist controversy are considerable. Author of two books, The Beauty Myth (1990) and Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the

21st Century (1993), Wolf has often either been seen as "too pretty" to "get away with" attacking society and the advertising industry for misusing traditional concepts of women's beauty to continue to oppress them (The Beauty Myth); or praised as a right-thinking feminist for challenging "victim feminism" and encouraging a more empowered view of women as capable of changing society (Fire with Fire). Some feminists call her analysis in this regard too simplistic.

An interview with Wolf in the London Jewish Chronicle Feb. 4 elicited some interesting connections between her ideas for women's social future and her heritage as a Jew. "What I am recommending is that women do as a gender basically what Jews have always done acquired the master's tools and then restructured the master's house. It's funny that the message that people are uncomfortable with me giving women, is the very message that every immigrant group teaches its children: 'Get power, a higher education, learn a language, pass on the skills.' These are very old-fashioned values for Jews."

Her understanding of feminism rejects the essentialist view that women are fundamentally different from - and morally/spiritual superior to — men. An explanatory analogy again includes an elemental Jewish theme, that of the chosen: "I have always balked at the idea of a chosen people. Because we have been victimized, we create a mythology — we must be the chosen people." In the same way, women must not identify themselves with a sense of specialness or power engendered by a false sense of difference, but instead embrace a fuller humanity that acknowledges a "darker side" of competitive feelings and desire for power.

Ginsburg Management Theory

You may ask yourself, "So, what's it like for a man to work for a Jewish lady judge?" If you're clerking for Supreme

Court Justice Ruth Ginsburg, it can allow for some innovations many women employees would think of as ideal, such as "flex-time" in a work schedule to accommodate family needs. Such is the case for law clerk David Post, whose wife's hectic work schedule prompted him to negotiate a flexible work day so he could take care of their children in the mornings. Commenting in an interview with the N.Y. Times Jan. 17, Ginsburg said: "When fathers take equal responsibility for the care of their children, that's when women will be truly liberated. I was so pleased to see that there are indeed men who are doing a parent's work, men who do not regard that as strange. . . I thought, 'This is my dream of the way the world should

Museum's "Invisible Women"

In my February column, I included an item describing a strange "erasure" of women in a painting hanging in the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv. The painting, by Maurice Gottlieb, depicted Jews praying in a synagogue on Yom Kippur; while the artist's original version included women in the balcony of an Orthodox shul, in the painting on the Museum's wall, the women have been painted right out of the picture. This was ostensibly in keeping with the Museum's idea of what constitutes "holiness" in Yom Kippur prayer — the absence of women. Needless to say, this definition of holiness stirred comment and controversy.

According to the US/Israel Women-to-Women Winter 1993-1994 newsletter, the painting has since come down because of protests. Whether the painting will be restored to its pre-tampered version, as well as whether it will be displayed again, remain to be seen. It seems clear to this columnist, however, that the Diaspora Museum's conception of artistic integrity is also in need of restoration.

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