

---

---

productive for rabbinical students who would soon have to articulate a personal Jewish theology in their preaching and teaching.

I recall today with great pain the sense of crisis that engulfed me when I was challenged to go beyond the texts and speak for myself. I had two options: to terminate my teaching career, or to rethink my theology from the ground up. I chose the latter course and this brought me back to Kaplan.

### **Building A Frame Of Integration**

What Kaplan provided me was a conceptualization that enabled me to integrate everything that the Seminary had taught me about Judaism, everything else that I had learned about how the world works and how human communities function, together with a theology that grounded the entire system. Kaplan gave me intellectual integrity. No small matter.

When I try to explain this, I frequently use the categories developed by James Fowler in his seminal *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (Harper and Row, 1981). Fowler borrows the stage-development model used by Ericson, Piaget and Kohlberg to understand how faith can evolve in different stages in the believer's life experience.

I can trace my personal faith development through Fowler's Stage 3, 4 and 5. I entered the Seminary with a set of deeply felt beliefs and values. But I had never been forced "...to step outside them, to reflect or examine them explicitly or systematically." (Fowler, p. 173). I was a classical Stage 3 believer.

My Seminary education brought me into Fowler's Stage 4, the phase marked by critical reflection on issues of identity and ideology. My Seminary education forced me to step outside my belief system, objectify it and examine it explicitly and systematically. Fowler's concluding description of this stage fitted me perfectly: "Disillusionment with one's compromises and recognition that life is more complex than Stage 4's logic of clear distinction and abstract concepts can comprehend, press one toward a more dialectical and multilevered approach to life truth" (p. 183).

### **Toward A Second Naivete**

I cannot possibly recapture in this brief statement the full subtlety of Fowler's description of Stage 5. It is best caught by Paul Ricoeur's term "second naivete," which I have used incessantly since then. Second naivete brings me back into "...the myths, ideal images and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's nurture within a...religious tradition..." It gives the

believer the capacity "...to see and be in one's or one's group's most powerful meanings, while simultaneously recognizing that they are relative, partial, and inevitably self-distorting apprehensions of transcendent reality" (p. 198).

Kaplan never read Fowler of course, nor do I know what he would have made of his theory. Nor, for that matter, have I bought Fowler as a whole. What is important, however, is that Fowler provided me with an understanding of the process involved in bringing my theology, my ideology and my practice into line. Fowler gave me the methodology, but the Jewish substance was largely Kaplan's.

To this day, my major challenge in teaching theology to rabbinical students is to help them move from Fowler's Stage 4 to his Stage 5. Though the culture of the Seminary is very different than it was in my student days, it remains a painful process for them. But the fact that I can so vividly recall how painful it was for me makes it possible to be patient and supportive with my students.

No, I am not a Reconstructionist. My institutional affiliation is with Conservative Judaism. But am I a Kaplanian? To a significant extent, yes. †

## **American Jewish women living in two worlds**

■ Riv-ElLEN Prell

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, in the wave of enthusiasm as well as anxiety over women's suffrage, Jewish women were eagerly engaged with issues about the "new woman." The American Jewish press featured special issues, sections, and even magazines devoted to the topic, "The American Jewish Woman." Despite the obvious differences between the Yiddish magazine *The Jewish Woman's World* and the English language supplement to the *American Hebrew*, for example, there was, nevertheless, a degree of unanimity about American Jewish womanhood. Jewish women were expected to have families and children for whom they cared. They were in large part defined by this obligation to meet the needs of others. For some, their obligations were tied to a domes-

---

RIV-ELLEN PRELL teaches in the Department of American Studies at the University of Minnesota and is a Sh'ma Contributing Editor.

tic and family-centered Judaism. For others, their responsibilities as Jewish socialists guided them to attend to those who were oppressed. With very few exceptions, wherever they stood ideologically or socially, Jewish women lived in a world that idealized the life of an American lady who was educated, culturally literate and refined (though not necessarily *bourgeois*).

### Finding Themselves As Americans And Jews

For most of the Jewish women of this era, the Jewish world and the American world were not radically distinct places. The majority of Jewish women became American while living among Jews. Trips to the beach or the cafe, working in a department store or a factory, or attending parties and balls occurred within a Jewish landscape. Jewish women were more likely to focus on the concreteness of their difference from other Jews among whom they lived, than from the diverse lot of Americans they encountered. In this period then, a Jewish woman thought a great deal about her difference from her mother, or if an immigrant, her difference from the native-born, and if native-born, her superiority to immigrant Jews. Jewish women learned how to become American ladies and women certainly from films and novels, but also from the Jews they did or did not want to emulate.

As we approach the end of the 20th century, it would be difficult to imagine even a handful of images of a Jewish woman's life that might speak to the concerns of the readers of Jewish feminist, lesbian, Zionist or "religious" publications. Nor do most Jewish women define themselves whether as woman, or Jew, solely in the context of a world of Jewish relationships. Paradoxically, as we have become more like one another, we are no longer the primary mirror into which we gaze to understand who we are.

### Distinguishing Themselves, Together

While it may be difficult to find in American Jewish women's lives today a common core of Jewish behaviors, there are powerful social realities that bind Jewish women to one another. By the measures of social scientists which determine the representative rather than the unique, American Jewish women have a great deal in common with one another, particularly in comparison to other American men and women, and even to Jewish men.

Jewish women who were born in the United States after World War II are highly educated, participate in the labor force for most of their adult lives, and have pursued careers that often involve helping and caring for others. They are increasingly professionalized, but not to the degree of Jewish men. They deviate from other highly educated and trained Americans only by their commit-

## Ta sh'ma

We invite you to send us your favorite text and comment. Submissions should not exceed 200 words. Be sure to include proper citation of sources. Hebrew will appear in transliteration.

### ■ Doug Weber

*A certain man said [to the agents who would deliver a bill of divorce to his wife], "If I do not return in thirty days, let this [document] serve as my wife's get (divorce papers)." At the end of thirty days, he came back, but the ferry delayed him. He said to them [from across the river], "Look! I have come back! I have returned!" But Shmuel said, "This is not called 'returning.'"*

KETUBOT 2b

Shmuel's insight has broader implications. Just *being seen* standing on the other side of the river and *being heard* yelling doesn't count! The husband must *physically* be present in order for the *get* not to take effect. As the *gemara* later explains, ferries are often delayed due to inclement weather, and we are expected to anticipate such frequently occurring circumstances. "Sorry," Shmuel says, "but you've missed the boat!"

How often do parents tell their child, "Sorry I missed the baseball game; I meant to come home early enough to see it, but an important client dropped in. I was thinking about you all through the meeting. I was at the game *in spirit*?" Is that what Shmuel would have called "coming back?"

With the growing geographic dispersion of our families and friends, how many birthdays, anniversaries, *b'nai mitzvah*, weddings and funerals can we miss before our star gravitates to the periphery of their constellations? There are limits to how much e-mail, faxes, phone calls, and even old-fashioned handwritten notes can replace physical presence. Being there "in spirit" may be well-intentioned, but often it means we have simply and forever "missed the boat." Judaism's insistence that there is no replacement for one's *physical* presence serves as a sobering yet positive challenge as we manage the schedule conflicts of our increasingly frenetic lives.

DOUG WEBER is Rabbi of Temple Shalom in Auburn ME and also serves as Associate Chaplain at Bates College in Lewiston ME.

---

---

ment to leave the workforce with the births of their second children, and in so doing support their spouses and children's ability to succeed. They also return to that workforce as their children grow older and stay there longer than virtually all other American workers.

All Jewish women do not marry, nor do they stay married, but the great numbers who do have made choices that allow them to support their intimates while asserting their own aspirations. As other studies are now showing, a good measure of that support also involves a relatively high commitment to maintaining the family's Jewishness and religious practice. In terms of a social reality, Jewish women do not live the same lives or in precisely the same worlds as Jewish men or other Americans. The balance that we pursue requires some related, but also different skills and issues. Our diversity even within the broad social continuity provides various challenges.

### Seeking A Unified Self

For example, many secular Jewish women have faced unique challenges in negotiating what should be a straightforward position in an "American" world. In our wide participation in many movements of liberation and political transformation, Jewishness remains a surprisingly powerful force. Feminism, gay and lesbian rights, and the left have regularly drawn Jewish women to Judaism who might never have identified with it. The powerful moments of consciousness that allow women (and men for that matter) to think critically about the United States and its culture consistently draw some Jews to Jewish community, Jewish practice and Jewish identity. American Jewish women have reported with some regularity that they discovered their Jewishness in settings where a political or cultural universalism rendered us different. Seeking the uniqueness of Jewish experience has allowed these women more fully to integrate changing identities that challenge assimilation from both the dominant culture and its critics.

Not only Jewish women who are newcomers to Judaism find themselves negotiating more than two worlds. Even within the tradition, our choices are not simply between freedom and authority or between democracy and tradition. We are constantly asked to position ourselves in that relationship. Unlike Jewish men, Jewish women who choose to embrace tradition may do so only to find themselves challenging it. What is sustaining, transforming, and most deeply expressed in an observant Jewish woman's life, the givens of male observance, have regularly ended up on the front pages of the American press in reports about, for example, women's use of the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

Religious authority means something rather different for Jewish women than for men. It sets limits not only in the secular world, but in one's "own" Jewish world as well. And we are always aware that our exercise of a Jewish life will transform, indeed has transformed, it entirely. Certainly the power of that fact is extremely compelling for the many women who rush to embrace the knowledge and competence that has so recently become available, who have and will become rabbis, scholars, teachers, and cantors in ever increasing numbers.

What American Jewish women may well have to teach Jews as we confront the classic problem of living in two worlds is that the binary is more complex. The worlds are no more easily distinguishable than the multiple features of our identities. What brings us to Jewish life, sustains us and maintains us there, is tied as deeply to who cares for children as it is to our Jewish practice and how we understand our lives as Jews. Those realities are relational, generational, private, public, and constantly under construction. †

---

**LAST CALL FOR  
PURIM  
DEADLINE  
February 6, 1998**

---

**Sh'ma** a journal of jewish responsibility  
440 Park Avenue South, Fourth Floor  
New York, NY 10016-8012

Periodical Postage Paid at New York, NY

\*19981211 S01999 152 3  
MR. FRED BERNSTEIN  
11 ST TROPEZ  
NEWPORT BEACH CA 92660-6826

