

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. שְׁעֵשָׂה לִי כָל-צָרָכַי:
ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. אוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגִבּוֹרָה:
ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. עוֹטֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתַפְאָרָה:
ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. שְׁלֵא עָשִׂי גוֹי:

HALF the KINGDOM

נשים אומרים

אנשים אומרים

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. שְׁעֵשָׂה לִי כָרְצוֹנִי:
ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. הַמַּעֲבִיר שָׁנָה מֵעֵינֵינוּ
וְחַנוּמָּה מֵעַפְפֵּינוּ:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו.
וְתִדְבְּקֵנוּ בְּמִצּוֹתֶיךָ. וְאַל תִּבְיָאֵנוּ
לְיַד עֲבוּרָה. וְלֹא לַיָּדַי נְסִיּוֹן וְלֹא לַיָּדַי
הַחַטָּא. וְתִדְבְּקֵנוּ בְּיַצָּר הַטּוֹב.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מִתִּיר אֲסוּרִים:
ברוך אתה יי אלהינו זִקָּף כְּפוּפִים:
ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מְלַבֵּשׁ עֲרֻמִּים:
ברוך אתה יי אלהינו הַגּוֹחֵן לַיַּעֲקֹב כְּחֵם:
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ברוך אתה יי אלהינו הַמַּכִּין מִצְעָדֵי-גִבּוֹר:



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This study guide has been made possible by a grant from Linda Bronfman with the assistance of the National Film Board of Canada.

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ISBN: 0-7722-0336-9

Legal deposit, National Library of Canada, 3rd trimester 1991

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P.O. Box 6100, Station A
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5



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HALF THE KINGDOM
Study Guide

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Study Guide

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Introduction
- 4 The Study Guide
- 5 The Women
- 5 Why a Film?
- 6 The Paradoxes of an Orthodox Jewish Feminist
(Norma Baumel Joseph)
- 12 Challenging Old Rituals and Developing New Ones
(E.M. Broner)
- 18 Representing the Strands of Social Justice
(Michele Landsberg)
- 22 A Life in Politics
(Shulamit Aloni)
- 25 New Ways to Celebrate and Learn
(Rabbi Elyse Goldstein)
- 29 Expanding Women's Role in Public Life
(Alice Shalvi)
- 32 Restoring Women's Experience to Religion
(Naomi Goldenberg)
- 36 Program Suggestions
- 37 Glossary of Terms
- 40 Film Credits
- 41 About the Filmmakers
- 42 Awards/Festival Participation
- 44 Suggestions For Further Reading
- 47 Selected Filmography

INTRODUCTION

Increasing numbers of women want “half the kingdom”. For Jewish women, this means an equal share in Jewish life: its rituals, worship, learning, community leadership, and more.

Fascinating is the fact that women who are challenging their tradition to include women, and be transformed by it, have *not* walked away from Judaism. Instead, they are engaged in a passionate effort to understand it, to study it, to reinterpret its classical texts and to weave, on the warp of Jewish culture, the threads of women’s experiences. This film tells how some Jewish women are staking a claim to that “kingdom” for themselves.

The title **HALF THE KINGDOM** comes from the Biblical story of Esther, which itself contains several paradoxes. *The Book of Esther* is about a brave woman who saves her people. (Esther is one of only two women to give her name to a book of the Bible; Ruth is the other.) She is viewed in Jewish history as a heroine, though a feminist rereading of the story indicates that while she acts with undoubted courage, she achieves power and influence (as women have had to do through the ages) through beauty and guile. Esther marries the King of Persia after he dismisses his first wife for not appearing before his guests. She reveals to the king that she is a Jew despite the fact that Jews in Persia are threatened with expulsion or destruction. Drawn by Esther’s beauty, the king offers her anything she chooses, “even half the kingdom” (Esther 5:3). Esther convinces the king of the wickedness of a courtier who has plotted against the Jews and thus saves her people. The tale has many lessons, including the fact that the king recognized, even if in a metaphor, that the queen was worthy of sharing the kingdom as his equal.

It is this struggle for equality that motivates the changes the women in this film are trying to bring to Jewish life today.

THE STUDY GUIDE

HALF THE KINGDOM is a “trigger” film, raising questions about the multiple roles of women challenging — and being challenged by — their religious and ethnic identities. While it is explicitly about Jewish women, the issues explored here parallel those of women of every ethnic and religious group. The film provides no pat answers, but can provide opportunities for viewers to respond with their own interpretations and solutions.

In and of itself, **HALF THE KINGDOM** can be used as a backdrop for discussion with a moderator or facilitator, exploring the topics that the women in the film raise — the problems of being a feminist and wanting to remain within the strictures and structure of Jewish law, for example, or the political problems facing women in Israel.

One of the most useful aspects of this film, however, is that it suggests to the viewer a number of issues for further exploration—making it an especially appropriate opening program for study groups, Jewish women’s conferences, university-based Women’s Studies programs and adult-education programs at Y’s and community centers. Senior citizens’ groups, youth groups, Jewish Studies classes and women’s organizations would also be suitable audiences.

This study guide will delineate those issues that the film does raise, but is intended especially as a resource for those group leaders, and individuals, who want to move on to explore in greater depth some of the areas **HALF THE KINGDOM** introduces.

THE WOMEN

HALF THE KINGDOM focuses on the real-life experiences and challenges of seven Jewish women. Diversity among them — even while they are all attached to their Jewish identities — is the hallmark of this group. The women, whose ages range from mid-30s to mid-60s, vary in religious practice from an unaffiliated academic whose specialty is a feminist and psychoanalytic approach to religion, through a Reform rabbi who puts a new spin on old rituals, to a feminist scholar steeped in the traditional texts of religious Judaism.

This is a film about women's attempts to define themselves within a culture that has often appeared to define women as less valuable than men. Now, women are speaking out in their own strong voices. The speaking out is also about naming - naming themselves, their biological or spiritual daughters, and forgotten women from the past. Excited by the gains of the women's movement, many Jewish women have explored their own lives and traditions in an attempt to encompass their heritage with a feminist perspective. They have now forged a place for themselves within the Judaic structure:

- women study traditional texts (once an opportunity open only to males) from a feminist perspective and teach these views to other women and to men;
- women create new ceremonies to observe the landmarks of their lives;
- women wrestle with traditions which have heretofore excluded them;
- women challenge unjust civil and religious laws.

Not all the struggles and victories in the film are religious; some are political and some are social, having to do with Judaism's traditional leanings toward social justice. But regardless of the issues, the contexts in which the women appear are rewardingly familiar (in a kitchen, chatting over coffee), delightfully revisionist (a middle-aged couple cooking together to prepare a holiday meal), and stunningly reconstructive of our expectations (women worshippers fighting off attackers as they try to pray with a Torah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem).

WHY A FILM?

Women have often learned by example. In the twenty-year-long struggle for self-definition that is the current wave of Jewish feminism, our primary teachers have been other women. Film has become an extraordinarily useful vehicle in popular culture both for reaching large numbers in its target audience and for its portrayals of real-life situations in ways its audience can identify with and discuss. It can both mirror aspects of women's own lives and illuminate those elements in other women's experience that have, until now, been in the shadows.

For this reason — because we have so much to teach and to learn from each other — the women whose voices speak to us from the screen provide important instruction. Their own lives and the issues they raise define the temper of the times for Jewish women in particular but, by extension, for all women who seek to maintain ties with traditions while at the same time living their lives in ways consonant with their feminist identities. **HALF THE KINGDOM** addresses basic issues faced by all women today, regardless of their religious or ethnic identification — issues of feminism, religious and cultural pluralism, and civil rights.

THE PARADOXES OF AN ORTHODOX JEWISH FEMINIST



"You don't know me because you can label me."

- Norma Baumel Joseph

In many ways the defining voice for the issues raised in the film is that of Norma Joseph, a Montreal-based scholar who teaches religion at Concordia University. She was a scholar-in-residence for three years for the Montreal Jewish Women's Federation, and has been a founding member of several groups lobbying to make Jewish law and practice more inclusive of women. Because she is a religiously observant woman, her concerns give us a baseline against which to mark the thoughts and feelings of several of the other women in the film.

There is no single authority in Judaism (as opposed, say, to the notion of absolute papal authority in Catholicism). There has always been room for differing opinions on law and custom, and plenty of scope for dissent. Thus, while many women have found Jewish law or practice too constricting for their own religious leanings, many Orthodox women have created their own opportunities for religious participation, sometimes providing opportunities for women of other groups within Judaism to put aside denominational differences and celebrate or worship together.

The Norma Joseph portions of the film deal with the formal theological, ritual, liturgical and scholarship issues confronting Jewish women today. There is also a strength in what appears to be her unambivalent embrace of traditional Judaism - impediments and all - and her willingness to work within the system to guarantee more rights for women. Norma seems guided by the same feelings that led Orthodox feminist Blu Greenberg to write in LILITH magazine that her belief in "the perfect God" does not allow her to think that the deity would "favor one sex over the other in any area of life."

Some of the concerns highlighted in the scenes with Norma Joseph:

■ Learning/Teaching

Study has traditionally been the male domain in Jewish life. Even in the small villages of Eastern Europe, the ideal division of labor was that men would spend their time in the study of religious texts, although this was a luxury few could afford, and women would help support the family financially.

The struggles of women who wanted to learn are recorded in journals and even in some religious texts themselves; in popular rendition the best example is I.B. Singer's tale "Yentl," about a woman who had to disguise herself as a boy in order to be admitted to the study hall.

For religiously devout males, study must take place on a daily basis. Women are beginning to take on this obligation as well, with "education days" replacing the less substantial fare that appeared on programs of Jewish women's organizations as recently as a decade ago. We see the emerging cadre of Jewish women scholars - Norma Joseph among them - who are writing and teaching on subjects of special interest to women: new interpretations of texts and liturgies, new rituals, and sociological analyses of Jewish life from a woman's perspective. Women's special role in explaining texts from the perspective of female experience - religious laws dealing with rape, for example - arises again in a later section with Rabbi Elyse Goldstein.

Norma represents the choice many "modern" Orthodox women are making in the wake of a spirited feminist critique of religious and social issues. Being well-versed in the traditional texts, she can challenge Jewish law to correct itself and make just decisions that will become more inclusive of women.

- *What about Norma Joseph's statement about the oppression of women and Jewish tradition: "I don't challenge it to defeat it; I challenge it to bring it to life for me and for this generation." Is there a risk in this challenge? Or only the possibility of enrichment?*

We see here some of the male-female issues all women must negotiate, whether they are married or single, heterosexual or lesbian. Women must not only change facts, but also change attitudes. It is not sufficient for women to change their own lives and practices. They must constantly defend their choices and act as advocates to those who wield power and control—whether these are rabbinic decisors (predominantly male at the moment) or their own relatives and friends.

■ Prayer and Ritual

While women and men worship together in Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform services, Orthodox Judaism, the most traditional branch of the faith, seats women separately behind some form of barrier, and does not count them in the **minyan** (prayer quorum of ten adult males) required for public prayer.

Rather than defy Jewish law and participate in mixed prayer, which in its most traditional interpretations had indeed excluded women from much participation in ritual, Norma Joseph and many hundreds like herself in the United States, Canada, Israel and elsewhere, choose to pray in groups with other women. These groups are loosely affiliated under the rubric of the Women's Tefillah (prayer) Network, and many of the women who have prayed with these groups claim that the experience of prayer with women - even hearing traditional melodies sung in soprano voices - has its own spiritual significance and is not in lieu of praying with men.

Women in these groups are not rejecting **halachah** (Jewish law). Instead, these women are reinterpreting halachah so that they can participate more fully in communal prayer. Following one or more of these models, the women have formed their own prayer groups and study groups:

- meeting usually once a month on Sabbath for services with the **Torah** (holy scrolls used in a synagogue for liturgical purposes);
- holding once-a-month **Rosh Chodesh** services (as we see in the film) to celebrate the beginning of the new month in the Jewish lunar calendar;

- establishing themselves as a women-only prayer quorum for special occasions, for example, to provide a context for a woman celebrating **Bat Mitzvah** (ceremony held when a girl reaches her religious majority - age of twelve plus one day);
 - creating women's "circles" to provide an opportunity for women to move beyond "observer" status to hold and dance with the Torah on the holiday of **Simchat Torah**, traditionally an occasion for men and children to march around the synagogue with the Torah scrolls;
 - gathering women together to read the **megillah** (scroll) of Esther, the text read on the holiday of **Purim** (holiday commemorating the deliverance of the Jews from the massacre plotted by Haman).
- *What would be your own choice: to accept compromises in synagogue as Esther and Norma do, or to walk away as Naomi does?*
 - *Have you ever participated in a worship service where women and men were seated separately? How did you feel?*
 - *Married women, like Norma, often report feeling freer to involve themselves in their own spiritual experiences in synagogue when they feel more like individuals and less bound to their families. She says she feels "empowered" by having a separate women's section, and that it keeps distractions at bay. Single and/or lesbian women have said that they prefer "separate seating" because they need not feel uncomfortable being in synagogue without a man. Much like the arguments pro and con surrounding the persistence of same-sex colleges, both sides have their adherents - from the standpoint of personal feelings, quite aside from the opinions of Jewish law. What do you think?*
 - *Can you think of examples in your own experience where having daughters has been a consciousness-raiser for men? Where inequities they haven't seen before are suddenly apparent to them because their own beloved child is being discriminated against?*

■ Political and Social Action

Religious issues have fallout far beyond what goes on in the worship service itself. Two examples, touched on in **HALF THE KINGDOM**, deserve expansion here.

The first has to do with the extraordinarily moving scene of women being harassed as they try to pray at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, a site sacred to all Jews. The women have carefully constructed their worship service so that, on religious grounds, it will offend no one. The organizers, including Norma Joseph, are an interdenominational group sensitive to the needs of the orthodox women praying among them. Yet, as is obvious from the film footage, the women are unreasonably attacked for their attempt to conduct a prayer service that is unquestionably valid from the perspective of Jewish law. These women are comfortable with their role as full Jews; a fact that appears to threaten the onlookers from the male side of the area.

Subsequent to this incident and to the continuing harassment of women attempting to hold worship services with a Torah at the Western Wall, the organizers of two groups: the International Committee for Women at the Kotel (“kotel” being the Hebrew word for “wall”) and the Israeli Women of the Wall, brought a case before Israel’s Supreme Court, the first time the religious rights of Jewish women have ever been defended in a court of law. The arguments marshalled by the male religious leaders were extreme. One said that the women represented “whorishness” and not holiness; another claimed that the “customs of the place” were being violated, leading one woman to ask, “*Whose* customs and *whose* place?”

The second issue where civil and religious law intersect to affect Jewish women’s lives concerns divorce. The laws around the **get** (divorce decree) state that only a man can instigate divorce proceedings, and that a woman who has not been divorced by her husband is forbidden to remarry in a Jewish ceremony; any secular remarriage would be considered illegitimate. (While Conservative Jewish law joins with the Orthodox in insisting on a “get” to terminate a marriage, Reform Judaism holds that a civil divorce is sufficient to terminate the marriage.)

In Canada, in 1990, Canadian Jewish women and men, led by Norma Joseph, pressed Canada's legislature to amend the Federal Divorce Act in such a way that would protect men and women from Jewish divorce abuse. It is now possible to include in the civil divorce conditions that would remove barriers to either partner's religious remarriage. This was one way of getting secular courts to influence men to give their wives a Jewish divorce. While some states in the United States have enacted statutes similar to Canada's, such rulings have often been challenged as a violation of the separation between church and state. Canada's Bill C61 Amendment to the Divorce Act (dated August 12, 1990) stands as a successful use of secular institutions to protect Jewish women's rights under Jewish law.

- *Do you agree with the effort to use whatever remedies the secular courts offer to right an inequity in Jewish law regarding women?*
- *It has been claimed that there has been insufficient effort put forth by the men who are the chief decision makers in today's circle of "decisors" on Jewish law to solve the problems of women who are left "chained" when a husband refuses to grant a divorce. After all, critics say, there have been other changes made in Jewish law over the years reflecting a shifting sense of justice: in Biblical times, Jews kept slaves and offered up animal sacrifices in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. These practices have been altered, so why has there been no creative thinking to figure out how to change divorce laws which penalize women? What do you think might be reasons why the Jewish divorce laws haven't been changed?*

CHALLENGING OLD RITUALS AND DEVELOPING NEW ONES



"There's no cartography that's preceeded us."

- E.M. Broner

Esther Broner, novelist, liturgist, inspirer of women, tackles the tradition in a different way from Norma Joseph. She has written five books, including *Her Mothers* (1975) and *A Weave of Women* (1978), and received two National Endowment for the Arts awards as well as a Wonder Woman award. A professor of English, Esther now lives in New York City where she writes and teaches. Her work and her life all

say that tradition is important to her, but that she is going to expand it to include a fuller equality for women; an action that the tradition cries out for and, in its highest form, embodies.

■ Prayer

Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah, the world's largest Jewish women's organization, wrote in 1916 to a male friend who had offered to say **kaddish** (the prayer for mourners) for her mother:

"I believe that the elimination of women from such duties was never intended by our law and custom - women were freed from positive duties when they could not perform them, but not when they could. . . . When my father died, my mother would not permit others to take her daughters' place in saying the Kaddish, and so I am sure I am acting in her spirit when I am moved to decline your offer."
(Quoted in *Jewish and Female*, p. 147. See **Suggestions For Further Reading** at the end of this study guide.)

Esther insists on saying the prayer in her father's memory throughout the year following his death, just as a religiously observant male would in the Jewish tradition, and as more and more women are choosing to do.

Esther's actions raise fascinating questions about how much a strong feminist will accommodate the rules of the game.

She wants to honor her father's memory by praying daily for the year of mourning. Traditional Jewish law says that these prayers must be recited in a **minyan** (prayer quorum of ten adult males). Often the only minyan that meet on weekdays are controlled by traditional men. These are the congregations which limit women's participation in the first place, refusing to count them in the minyan. Esther's plight—of being ignored, harassed, hidden behind a makeshift curtain—has been experienced by countless other women who want to say kaddish.

- *Should she refuse to attend? (Some women do, saying that under no circumstances will they worship anywhere where women and men are not worshipping together.)*
- *Should she try to change the rules at the Orthodox synagogue? (She does, in part, by violating the interpretation of the law which says that **kol ishah** - the voice of a woman - is not to be heard, and singing out the prayers loud and clear so that the men on the other side of the divider know that she's there.)*
- *Should she try to form a prayer quorum of women, accepting the Orthodox law but binding herself to it in a way that does not diminish her self-respect? (She tries a version of this by having Michele Landsberg and other women join her at services. Some women have formed groups for the express purpose of providing a grieving friend with a place to worship during the mourning period.)*
- *Has anyone ever tried to say kaddish and been told that a man should do it? Been told that it's not necessary for a woman to take on the obligation? That it would be better to hire a paid mourner (male) than to say the prayer yourself as a female?*

To the discussion leader: *Since mourning the loss of a loved one is such a universal experience, this is usually a useful area to explore with almost any group. Even if the participants are not religiously observant, anyone who has ever been in mourning usually*

has had the experience of wanting a supportive group for comfort, and can identify with Esther Broner's situation. However, if no one comes forward immediately with a personal anecdote, you might lead off by telling the Henrietta Szold story.

■ Ritual

There is more to Esther's work than the role model she enacts in this film around mourning rituals. She says here that "there's no cartography" for mapping out what women today would like to do with Jewish spirituality. She herself is a model for women's explorations of new ritual possibilities within Judaism.

While in the film Esther appears as a challenger of the tradition, one who tries to expand men's understanding of women's participation in Judaism, in other arenas she is the doyenne of "for women only" rituals:

- her **Haggadah** (Passover evening liturgy - Passover being the holiday commemorating the Hebrews' liberation from slavery in Egypt), written with Naomi Nimrod, is the basis for the annual feminist **seder** (Passover ceremonial meal) which she and others host in New York City;
- rituals for peace are enacted with Jewish and Moslem women atop Mount Sinai in Israel;
- a women's **tashlich** (expiation ceremony on the first day of the Jewish New Year) service is conducted during **Rosh Hashanah** (the Jewish New Year) in which women cast crumbs into the Hudson River, symbolizing what they'd like to cast away from the old year.

Esther represents two challenges at once: to change the familiar rituals and practices so that they will be more inclusive of women (including the alteration of liturgies so that they are non-sexist); and to create a whole new body of ritual and ceremony that, while constructed around traditional forms (Passover seder, tashlich), is radically different in content. Let's take Passover, a holiday for which the preparations have typically meant a lot of work for women -

cooking and cleaning and not much glory. Here are some highlights from the Broner seder and other feminist or egalitarian seders:

- the traditional "four sons" in the story are transformed into four daughters;
- the women in attendance are asked to invent their own plagues as fair punishments for aspects of life which have been particularly oppressive to women in the past year;
- Miriam, the sister of Moses, is spoken about and celebrated—according to legend she sang the children of Israel across the Red Sea;
- the story is told of Shifra and Pu'ah, the midwives who saved newborn Jewish babies from slaughter by the Egyptians.

- *How might Judaism be different if women had a greater role in shaping it all along?*
- *If you could envision a "perfect" Passover seder, what would it be? Changed roles for all? Women? Men? Children? (Passover is an ideal holiday to ask about because it is the occasion almost uniformly celebrated even by secular Jews, it is celebrated at home, and it encourages innovations both explicitly because the haggadah suggests it and implicitly because there are no clergy present.)*
- *In some households, girls and boys, women and men, all took on different responsibilities each week for Shabbat, including cooking special foods, saying the blessings over candles, wine and challah, and leading songs at the end of the meal. It is only custom, not Jewish law, that requires that women bless the candles and men the wine. A Jew of either sex preparing for Sabbath alone would be required to light candles and recite all the other blessings as well.*
- *Can you think of any Jewish holiday stories from your own childhood that include girls and women? At **Chanukah** (8-day holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem after its defilement by Antiochus of Syria), almost all the stories about the Maccabees have to do with men. Can you retell any tales to include girls and women? One*

mother said that she drew long hair on half the characters in the Jewish storybooks she read to her preschoolers, and just changed the names to make half of them female. What effect do you think the traditional stories have on girls who hear them at school or at home?

- *Is anything missing from the language of any of the prayers you can recall? A woman's voice - or even a female pronoun in referring to God? On the simplest level, some congregations insert substitute terminology for God, replacing, "God of our ancestors" in the standard prayerbook with "God of our father," "Holy One" for "King," and so on.*

- *Can you think of other substitutions? Has anyone ever felt left out when hearing portions of the prayers read aloud? Some of the prayers ask for blessings "for my wife and family." The norm has so obviously been male. As Norma Joseph recounts, her husband was finally won over to this understanding by his own young daughter; he admits to her that the prayer which thanks God for not having made him a woman "has no place in my prayers. I won't say it."*

- *How do you feel about the fact that his daughter's feelings of exclusion are the final determining factor in changing Norma's husband's practice? What daughters do you know who have experienced Judaism (or any religious participation) differently from the way their mothers have?*

- *The language of prayer is of paramount importance to some, while to others social change rather than ritual change has been their goal as Jews and as women. What would you describe as your own requirements for what will make Judaism and Jewishness feel fulfilling and "right"?*

Esther's novel *A Weave of Women* eloquently and presciently shows a group of women in a Jerusalem house living out the various struggles women face. Prescient because this novel suggests the violence that women's desire for equality can incite in people who are easily threatened by the ideas of others. Her novel, though not mentioned in the film, prefigures in an eerie way the violence unleashed against the women at the Wall, a case of life imitating art. And she touches on this when she comments on screen: "In my books I can solve what I can't solve in my life."

She also articulates in the film what she understands to be the subtle connections between “sexuality and religiosity,” a theme that surfaces in *A Weave of Women* and in some ways in an earlier novel, *Her Mothers* and in a saga-length poem, *Journal/Nocturnal*.

- *Can you think of other examples where women's sexuality is irrelevantly drawn into an issue? Where women involved in political change are accused of being sexually promiscuous? Or where women lobbying for women's equality are called “man-haters”?*
- *Do you believe that writing is an appropriate or effective way to bring about social change? Can you think of any fiction (or film) which has altered the way people view themselves or their religion or government or relationships?*

REPRESENTING THE STRANDS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE



"Politics is my balachab, it's my way of being."

- Michele Landsberg

Michele Landsberg, feminist columnist for The Toronto Star, recipient of two national newspaper awards, and the author of three books, among them *Women and Children First*, forcefully represents the strands of social justice in Judaism.

■ Gender and Class

When the camera shows us Michele in her childhood synagogue, Toronto's Reform Holy Blossom Temple, we hear her delineate issues of class and gender in a way no one else in this film does:

- at her Confirmation, the girls had to "get dressed up and put on lipstick and look pretty" to get blessed by the rabbi. What does she imply here? That the role of girls and women, even in an allegedly egalitarian Reform setting, was to be ornamental;
- her mother was ostracized for having to work for a living, in a community that placed a high value on material success;
- in her own family, Michele told her children that the smallest and most helpless had to be served first at mealtimes;
- as a Jew growing up in Canada, where Jewish identity is sometimes more repressed than in the U.S. - and certainly was in Anglo-dominated Toronto in the postwar years - she felt herself to be "an outsider, challenging set and received opinions," a stance that serves her well as a Jewish activist and as a feminist.

■ Diversity and Acceptance

Michele is first introduced to us in the section on Esther Broner, in a way that makes her respect for diversity very real. She is ideologically committed to not participating in any segregated event, including praying in a setting where women are separated from men by a **mechitza** (partition), but when her friend Esther wants a companion in prayer, she is willing to move beyond ideology to support her.

The intolerance for diversity, highlighted in the scenes from Michele Landsberg's childhood synagogue, persists today. Some people in the Jewish community would have it monolithic and homogenized.

- *Can you think of any instances where the Jewish community has wanted to shut out certain segments because they have done or said something thought not to be acceptable, either to "all" Jews or to the non-Jewish world? Some examples:*
 - *a woman who was being recruited for a leadership position being told that she couldn't become a serious candidate for the job because she was single, and hence not a good role model for younger Jews;*
 - *the denial Jewish alcoholics, drug abusers and gamblers face because "Jews don't drink," become addicts, or gamble. For Jewish women there is a double veil of denial;*
 - *the same denial for the issue of domestic violence, despite the fact that several cities in North America now have shelters for battered women under Jewish auspices;*
 - *the disbelief in some families when someone "comes out" as a homosexual or a lesbian, despite the fact that there are now gay synagogues in several cities.*
- *What are some of the ways you can imagine Judaism being made more appealing to younger women? Does Michele's critique of her childhood community have any resonance for you? Who are the people you think might feel marginal within the Jewish fold?*

All of this is suggested when Michele tells of her own adolescence and her yearning for a Jewish experience that was more authentic, more true-to-life, than what she was getting in her synagogue.

- *What do you think about a Jewish life which expects everyone to be heterosexual and married, marching two-by-two into every event?*
- *What about the cultural diversity of Jews in North America today? What is it like to grow up Jewish and female not only in a poor family in Toronto, but as a North American **Sephardi** (from Spain and other Mediterranean countries)? Or a recent Russian Jewish immigrant? Or an Iranian Jew?*
- *A suggestion for programming: a panel on Growing Up Jewish and Female, featuring women from your own community who may not fit the description that for so long was thought to apply to every North American Jew: Eastern European background, prosperous, heterosexual, married. Try a Jewish woman whose family came from Aleppo, Syria, or from Marakkesh, Morocco. A woman never married. A lesbian.*

■ Religion and Morality

Why does Michele, who identifies herself as a secular Jew, weep every time she sees her daughter carrying the Torah?

Although she claims "I can't explain these contradictions, but I'm a Jew," the explanation may lie in a salient fact about Judaism and about the Torah itself. Judaism is a religion - and a culture - focused on daily reality. The Torah makes Michele's eyes tear both because of her daughter and feminist progress and because the Torah embodies Michele's own stated highest principles. It is not a text about belief, but about how to live morally and justly. This puts the quest for women's rights in the mainstream of the Jewish ethical tradition. Jews learn from the Torah not to oppress workers, children, elders, and so on. Freeing women from oppression follows suit.

- *Can you identify with aspects of Michele's story - feeling that religion had no meaning? Some women turn away from a religious tradition altogether if it feels rejecting. Michele's early experiences in a Jewish community must have had positive components, because she has chosen to stay rather than to look for spiritual possibilities elsewhere.*

- *How about new rituals to give meaning to old traditions and to help incorporate women's experiences into Judaism? Women around the world have been creating new ceremonies to mark occasions in their lives and to celebrate the Jewish calendar differently. These celebrations can be a way of bringing people into the community who have felt alienated or disaffected by aspects of the tradition they have viewed as rejecting. For insights and examples of such ceremonies (for Bat Mitzvah, adult Bat Mitzvah, for marking such occasions as completing a course of Jewish or secular study, and more) see **Suggestions For Further Reading** at the end of this study guide.*

A LIFE IN POLITICS



*"A woman in the Opposition...
they cannot stand it."*

- Shulamit Aloni

Shulamit Aloni, a lawyer in Tel Aviv, is a leader of Israel's Citizens' Rights Movement. She is one of literally only a handful of women in the 120-member Israeli parliament (Knesset) and, like Michele Landsberg, she sees life through the filter of politics.

Shulamit Aloni operates almost exclusively in the political arena in Israel, making her mark - or trying to - in what is essentially now a man's world. In her case that means electoral politics in a country of three million Jews.

The early promise of Israel was of a country which would offer full equality of the sexes in all arenas, the labor force not least among them. The founders of the country named women's equality as one of their ideals, and the original form of kibbutz (collective) life was to have featured women and men doing almost identical work. The reality has been that women sometimes do "men's" jobs along with child care and kitchen work, but men rarely take on traditionally female job roles in the kitchen or nursery.

The country's initial promise of gender equality has not yet been realized. Today, there are fewer women in parliament than at any time since the founding of the State in 1948. A short school day restricts the ability of mothers with young children to hold full-time jobs or to advance on a career ladder. While women as well as men serve in the military, their service does not usually lead to employment in civilian life, which is often the case for men, particularly those in leadership positions.

- *What are the images you have of Israel? When you think of posters of women and men in that country, or when you recall illustrations from children's books or school projects, what are the first pictures you recall?*

- *Have you ever visited Israel? If so, what are some of the differences you might note in comparing women's roles here and there?*

As has been the case in most countries, certain laws in Israel have been challenged on the basis of discrimination against women. Distinctions between women and men in Jewish law have become the basis for overt discrimination under Israel's civil law. Here are some examples of the challenges Shulamit Aloni and others are facing:

■ Marital Status

Briefly: a Jewish marriage can only be terminated by a Jewish divorce at the instigation of the husband. Several facts flow from this basic asymmetry:

- a Jewish woman who wishes to remarry cannot do so in a Jewish ceremony if she does not have such a divorce;
- though she may have a civil divorce, any children resulting from a remarriage under civil law (if no Jewish divorce was obtained) will be considered "illegitimate" under Jewish law and barred from marrying anyone other than non-Jews or other "illegitimate" offspring;
- interestingly, there is no concept of illegitimacy in an out-of-wedlock birth if the mother is not married. Also interesting: no "illegitimate" status accrues to a child born of a father who is still considered married to another woman;
- a woman whose husband refuses to divorce her is considered a "chained" woman, neither wife nor widow, and the current estimate is that at least 5000 are considered **agunot** (chained women) in Israel today. This is a situation which has given rise to support groups of Jewish women around the world who have employed such tactics as picketing the business or home of a man who refuses to give his wife a Jewish divorce.

The implications of these "status" issues are not as critical in **Diaspora** countries (countries outside Israel), in most of which the citizens are under the jurisdiction of secular laws. Israeli

women and men, however, if they are Jewish, are governed by traditional interpretations of Jewish law in terms of personal or marital status. In Orthodox communities in the United States and Canada, and in many instances in Israel, husbands have been known to extort financial payment and sometimes even custody of children before they will agree to releasing their wives with a Jewish divorce.

■ Abortion Rights

Although abortion is technically legal in Israel, to qualify for a government-funded abortion a woman must present her case before a panel of three "experts," usually doctors and social workers. Jewish law does not forbid abortion, but in fact mandates it when the physical or mental health of the mother is in danger; her life takes precedence over any potential life of the fetus.

- *Do you believe that a woman should consult her spouse, a clergyman or a doctor before coming to the decision that she wants to terminate a pregnancy? When?*
- *Have you given testimony, or heard testimony from other women, about abortions performed illegally, or about trials endured in getting "permission" for a legal abortion?*
- *Do you think that the wall between religion and government is breached if laws concerning abortion are allowed to remain on the statute books?*

■ Employment

Shulamit Aloni and others have protested inequities in Israel's labor laws which have "protected" women from certain kinds of jobs and hours, have required them to retire five years earlier than men, and have effectively kept women out of the most desirable jobs.

- *Do you think Shulamit Aloni would be more or less effective as a lobbyist for women's issues than a male politician would be? Why?*

NEW WAYS TO CELEBRATE AND LEARN



*"For me, becoming a rabbi was...
taking what is mine."*

- Elyse Goldstein

Even the more liberal non-Orthodox denominations of Judaism (representing the largest numbers of North American Jews) have discriminated against women—though in more subtle ways than by the formal exclusion we have seen demonstrated in Norma Joseph's experiences or in those of Esther Broner and women in Israel. The film alludes to the

fact that the Reform movement first voted to accept women as rabbis in 1922; the first woman rabbi was not ordained until fifty years later!

Elyse Goldstein, a Reform rabbi and the director of Kollel: A Centre for Liberal Jewish Learning, Toronto, is one of a few hundred women now serving as rabbis in Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative Judaism. She is the author of several articles dealing with her struggles to use the religious traditions of Judaism without being tightly bound by them.

■ Study

Women rabbis and scholars have been unearthing writings of Jewish women and have been applying a "female methodology" to the study of traditional Jewish texts (see **Suggestions For Further Reading** at the end of this study guide). Elyse Goldstein describes in the film how her study partner, a male rabbi, was astonished to have a whole new perspective on a Talmudic passage after she explained to him how she, as a woman, reacted to a passage dealing with forced sex.

- *Women have traditionally been excluded from the rabbinate and from scholarship. What would Jewish scholarship and leadership have been like if we'd had this "other half" in place all along? Cynthia Ozick, in an article appearing in LILITH magazine and later anthologized in Heschel's On Being a Jewish Feminist, has described the accomplishments of Jews over the*

centuries as the Jewish “half genius,” referring to the fact that only men had the chance to participate.

- From 1972 onward, women have been ordained as rabbis, first in the Reform movement (the most liberal branch of Judaism, of which Elyse Goldstein is a part), then in Reconstructionism (somewhat more traditional, but egalitarian) and in Conservative Judaism. Orthodox Judaism (accounting for about 10% of North America’s approximately six million Jews) does not yet recognize women as rabbis or cantors. Have you ever participated in services led by a woman, or heard prayers chanted by a woman cantor? How did you feel?

- What do you think is gained in a congregation with a woman in the pulpit? Some possibilities:

- more participation for women in every role in the synagogue because of the presence of this female role model—for girls as well as women;
- congregants sometimes more willing to approach a woman rabbi as a counselor when they want help with a personal problem;
- a greater sensitivity to “minority” issues generally: the feelings of handicapped congregants, widowed or divorced people, gays and lesbians, interfaith couples.

■ Ritual

Elyse is shown in the film officiating at a baby-naming ceremony for a newborn Jewish daughter. Traditionally, a circumcision ceremony at eight days has welcomed newborn male Jews to the community. While there was usually some formality to the naming of a newborn daughter, especially in Sephardic liturgy, the ceremony was usually not elaborate, and often took place in synagogue shortly after the birth with neither mother nor baby present.

One of the most widespread innovations in Jewish ritual life over the past generation has been the inclusion of welcoming ceremonies for daughters. Even in the most traditional

families, it is now the norm to have a celebratory party, at least, to mark the arrival of a Jewish baby girl. While there is no physical parallel to the ritual circumcision of boys, the celebration usually includes a festive meal and the recitation both of traditional prayers and material created especially for this occasion.

These ceremonies are sometimes given Hebrew names, to parallel the concept of **brit milah** or bris (covenant ceremony) for a boy. Two terms newly popular for girls are **simchat bat** (rejoicing in a daughter) and **bat brit** (a covenant for a daughter). (See Schneider's *Jewish and Female* for more elaborate descriptions of some of the new ceremonies.)

This is a good place to note that women's reformatting of general Jewish rituals has had two major consequences. Because there are no precedents in the tradition for many of the new ceremonies, there has been tremendous creativity in rethinking the styles and purposes of Jewish rituals.

Both Elyse Goldstein and Esther Broner make reference to the fact that in the traditional liturgy there are no prayers or blessings for celebrating most of the marker events in women's lives. Norma Joseph teaches the Biblical tale of "the daughter of Yiftach" (Jephtha in the *Book of Judges*)—herself nameless. Norma comments that the retreat this woman went on with her women friends could have been the basis centuries ago for creating a women's holiday, except that the tradition ignored the opportunity.

Until now, Jewish texts were assumed to have been written and interpreted by men. There is now an emerging cadre of Jewish women scholars (see **Suggestions For Further Reading** at the end of this study guide) reading these texts through a female lens. Women are now combing Jewish texts with a scholarly fervor to hear women's voices, to discover where and when and why women were "written out" of the culture's history, and to tease out those portions which might actually have been written by women.

Much creative energy has gone into making up for this lack. The ceremonies and new blessings fall into two categories: celebrating the Jewish calendar of holy days with more

female content (see the section on Passover, as one example) and noting in some Jewish way the landmarks in women's individual lives.

Here is a sampling of the latter:

- blessings to be said at the onset of menarche in adolescence, or with the arrival of each month's menstrual period. Elyse Goldstein has written about her own experiences in LILITH magazine. She uses a variant of the morning prayer Norma Joseph objects to in her husband's daily worship: Elyse thanks God every month "for having made me a woman";
- special prayers for becoming pregnant for the first time, or when weaning a child, or upon reaching menopause;
- Esther Broner mentions in the film becoming a "crone," a wise old woman. One creative liturgist, wanting to mark her sixtieth birthday in a Jewish context, held a "croning ceremony" in her synagogue, where she recited blessings with her children and grandchildren, standing under a canopy created out of her late father's prayer shawl ("At 60: A Ceremony of Wisdom," LILITH magazine, Fall 1988).

• *Are there any events in your own life you would like (or would have liked) to celebrate with some Jewish activity? Some suggestions: give charity to a related cause to celebrate something good in your own life - if you are having a party or a festive meal to mark an important occasion in your life, give a percentage of what the meal cost to feed the hungry. Chant a song, recite a poem (or a verse from a sacred text), say a prayer, dedicate a piece of your own work to another person, living or dead, who has inspired you.*

• *Would you feel comfortable creating a quorum of friends to celebrate - or mourn - with you? You might ask each one to think of a new way to mark the occasion with ritual.*

• *Can you think of other simple ways you can increase the meaning or value of a special time in your own life by linking it to the lives of others and to a tradition in some way?*

EXPANDING WOMEN'S ROLE IN PUBLIC LIFE



"When I first looked at the inside of a Torah I was fifty-three years old."

- Alice Shalvi

The diversity in Alice Shalvi's own life gives us some idea of the worlds that a Jewish woman can straddle. Professor of English at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a secular institution, she is also principal of Pelech, the religious progressive girls' high school shown in the film, and actively works to expand women's role in Israel's public life as founder and head of the Israel Women's Network.

■ Ritual

At Chanukah, we see a familiar scene of cooking and candle-lighting. What do you notice about the Chanukah celebration Alice is preparing for her children and grandchildren? The prayers are the old ones, and the rituals, too. Alice prepares the traditional potato pancakes for the holiday, and also leads the prayers and the singing; she fulfills both the traditional female nurturing role and the leadership role once reserved exclusively for men. But wait! Almost more remarkable is the fact that her husband is in the kitchen with her, wearing an apron and pushing potatoes through the food processor.

The baby-naming ceremony for Alice's granddaughter shows us how ubiquitous this "new" ceremony has become, even among the most tradition-conscious Jews.

Aliyah. A word which means both to "go up" to Israel as a new immigrant, and, in its liturgical sense, to be called up to say blessings over the Torah. Women in Conservative Judaism were "permitted" this honor after 1973; Reform and Reconstructionist women have always had aliyot (plural of aliyah). But Orthodox Judaism, which does not offer women any public roles in the usual worship service, has recently provided women the opportunity to have aliyot in all-women prayer groups. Alice Shalvi's overwhelming emotional response to

her first aliyah echoes what many women have recounted in the twenty years or so that aliyot for women have become more commonplace.

■ Education

Alice Shalvi integrates secular and religious styles of learning and merges the content of her two disciplines. She's also a renegade, having convinced the Ministry of Religious Education to permit her to teach girls a curriculum in Jewish studies normally reserved only for boys. Pelech has been an extraordinary experiment, both for students and for teachers, as female instructors have given lessons in aspects of the traditional Jewish curriculum once virtually forbidden to them. Today there are even seminaries for advanced Jewish studies in America and Israel which direct their efforts to female students.

■ Politics

Alice has challenged the political establishment in Israel by founding and heading an organization - the Israel Women's Network - that has as its goal the empowerment of women, to this end challenging discriminatory laws on women's pension rights and job conditions and reconstructing the rules of electoral politics. She has been a pioneer in facilitating dialogue between Jewish and Arab women in Israel as well as in the United States and she acts as a liaison between Israeli women and Jewish and other women's groups around the world. Because she is working in Israel, her political and religious activities often intersect; some of the work of the Israel Women's Network relates to freeing women from the oppressive divorce laws.

The scenes with Alice are remarkable not only for their overt content, having to do with her work for change, but also because of the message they convey about women and relationships.

- *Does this suggest something about the roles of women and men? Can women take on more and more responsibility in the leadership department while still continuing to have all the domestic responsibility too?*

• *Is there something powerful about seeing a woman in both her kitchen and her classroom? In the film we see this with Alice and Norma, and in a conversation between Norma and Naomi. Are we accustomed to seeing male professors in their kitchens? Alice says that she has always had her husband's support. How do you react to this statement?*

• *Do you enjoy this diversity or do you think that in order to be respected women must keep their domestic lives under wraps? Do you think that women should cut back on their nurturing or try to teach men how to do it too? We obviously feel closer to people we encounter in a more personal context. Is this closeness useful for us when we look to these women as role models, or would we prefer to have our role models more distant?*

Single Jewish women and men have been accused of stereotyping one another; the men say the women are spoiled and materialistic. Both women and men may be reflecting back to their opposite numbers some of the anti-Semitic stereotypes that non-Jews have had of Jews: materialistic, self-serving, acquisitive. Jews, like other minority groups, have absorbed some of the prejudices others have had about them. The scene of Norma Joseph studying with her husband, of Alice Shalvi cooking with hers, the description of Elyse and her male study partner all suggest that Jewish women and men can live and work together without having these biases intrude.

• *What do you think? Do you think that these women are exceptional, and that the "majority" of Jewish women are different from this? If so, how?*

RESTORING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE TO RELIGION



"For me, Judaism is like a chisel to chip away at a monolithic Christian identity."

- Naomi Goldenberg

Naomi Goldenberg is Professor of the Psychology of Religion and Co-ordinator of Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa. She is a Jewish woman who, while not herself involved in the study of Judaism or its texts, has come at the tradition by way of her feminist interest in restoring women's experience to religion in general.

Of all the women in **HALF THE KINGDOM**, Naomi is the one most willing to push at the limits of what has been defined as Judaism. In her three books she has written about women's roles in past cultures, about worship of goddess figures, and, like many women who have been looking to the collective past for resources, she has been asking questions about which women's experiences were left out when Judaism as we know it was being codified.

■ Family and Community

In Naomi we see another variation on the theme of women's multiple roles. She voices her concern about women's roles in Judaism as an academic and as a feminist scholar of religion. But we see her also as the mother of a small daughter, whose father is not Jewish, and to whom she would like to transmit something about the Jewish tradition. The academic concerns take on a very personal, intimate meaning here when Naomi, like many intermarried Jews, searches for comfortable ways to identify with a Jewish community.

Naomi speaks of her feelings of distance from a Judaism that has excluded women's experience, yet she is willing to stay connected. She consciously identifies herself as "an atheist, feminist" Jew, and wants to find "a group of people with whom I could be all these things." Her words in the film make explicit the search for community that Michele

Landsberg hints at when she speaks of her own sense of alienation from organized Judaism as a child.

- *Some women report feeling more alienated as Jews in a formal synagogue setting than they do in the outside world. Has this ever happened to you?*

There have been attempts in almost every community in North America to found **havurot** (small-scale prayer and study groups) to provide a more intimate context than a large synagogue permits. Sometimes these havurot turn out to be as male-dominated as the synagogues themselves; others are truly egalitarian, with women as full participants and the structure and language of the services fully inclusive of women's experiences.

■ Marginality

A common denominator in the film is that each woman reports feeling marginal even in the communities she has called her own. Once her consciousness has been raised, it is often difficult to participate in traditional liturgies without feeling some degree of discomfort, and Naomi touches on this. But just as she feels marginal as a woman in Judaism (material covered by Michele Landsberg among others in the film), she makes the point that as a Jew she is marginal in the larger, non-Jewish society. This marginality makes her an especially astute critic of that larger world. She sees it more clearly because as a Jew she is in it but not of it, and she articulates this when she describes Judaism as a "chisel" against, or a challenge to, Christian hegemony.

- *Do you think that she also sees herself as a woman using feminism as a chisel to chip away at those aspects of the Jewish tradition which are sexist?*

■ Women and Spirituality

In Jewish life today there have been several responses to the notion that one can pray to a Goddess or to a God-figure identified as female as well as to a more male-identified God:

- formal scholarly appreciations of the Hebraic roots of many goddess-figures from ancient cultures appear in Raphael Patai's *The Hebrew Goddess* and in Naomi Goldenberg's own book *The Changing of the Gods*, a fascinating look at what was left behind when human notions of a deity became masculinized;
 - some women say that they simply imagine a God who is female. Others have changed the language of their prayers, using poetry that actually refers to God in female terms - for example, lines like "shelter me in the folds of Thy skirt";
 - the formal use of goddess-related material has been criticized by some Jews, and actually condemned by some Jewish authorities as harking back to a pre-Judaic form of idol-worship. Yet many explorations by Jewish feminist scholars and writers - Marcia Falk and Judith Plaskow among them, have pushed at the edges of what had in the past been considered appropriate Jewish forms of worship. Falk has expressed her uneasiness with even the most common prayers in the Jewish liturgy because of their assumption of a hierarchy between man (literally) and God. She prefers to conceptualize a God immanent in - suffusing - everything in the world. Plaskow has stated that she sees herself questioning the very structure of Judaism by questioning the hierarchical notions that underly the Jewish people's covenant with God;
 - Judaism has always "officially" held that God was neither male nor female, but contained aspects of both. Hence the **Shekhinah** - a presence thought to be the female manifestation or the female qualities of God.
- *Does the idea of returning to some female form of God appeal to you personally as a form of worship? If you pray, do you imagine a listener or a divine being who receives your prayers? In your understanding, or in your imagination, is this force male? Female? Neither?*

■ Diversity

- There has been a great deal written and spoken about fragmentation among and within religious groups, certainly within Judaism, as religious factions have become less and less tolerant of one another.

This intolerance has been kept at bay among Jewish women to some extent. Jewish women of vastly different backgrounds and religious practices have worked together for numerous common goals: women's efforts for peace, support for Israel, lobbying for a Judaism more inclusive of women in all its denominations. **HALF THE KINGDOM** shows us two paths toward women's cooperation:

- Norma and Naomi in the kitchen. (What a wonderful restoration of what was thought of as "women's proper place." It is indeed the proper place for intimacy and sharing. Women recognize this now and are not embarrassed to be sitting at a kitchen table rather than at a boardroom table). Two women who are passionately connected to Judaism in very different ways, who have agreed to disagree on the role of the tradition in their lives, and who freely state that they have learned from one another. Learning with and from another woman is very different from the traditional male model of studying Jewish texts, where disputation and an argumentative or confrontational personal style are the norm;
- Norma, at the International Feminist Conference in Jerusalem, on her pain of being an outsider even in the community of Jewish feminists who should be her natural allies: "When the feminist world finds me too Jewish and the Jewish feminist world finds me too religious, I find it too difficult."

Fortunately, despite each woman's sense of disappointment or dismay with aspects of Jewish life, each has the courage, the patience, and the desire to stake her claim to at least "half the kingdom."

PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

1. With a panel of women from different Jewish ethnic backgrounds, different ages, different marital choices and sexual orientations, ask which "half of the kingdom" each of them would like.
2. Create a panel of women of different religious identifications and/or nationalities (Jewish and female, Caribbean and female, Catholic and female, and so on) and explore the ways in which different traditions have imbued women with different ideas about their own potential, or their own differences from the men of their group.
3. Assemble a panel of three or four Jewish women from different denominations within Judaism to explore what common goals they have, and what they can learn from one another's successes in helping mainstream Judaism be more responsive to women's participation and women's content in religious experiences.
4. Within the Jewish community, create a panel of women who are social-service providers for children, the elderly, battered Jewish women, the disabled, women in poverty, displaced homemakers, or Jewish women alcoholics, to get a sense of how secular Jewish life has come to see women's needs more realistically over the past decade.
5. Plan a Jewish film festival.
6. Create your own rituals in a group.
7. Write a **midrash**, (a contemporary story based on a Jewish female character), and share it.
8. Plan and experience a Jewish women's retreat.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abah: Father, diminutive for **Av**.

Agunot: A woman whose husband refuses to divorce her (plural).

Aliyah: Def. 1: The privilege of being called up to the Reading of the Law at public readings in the synagogue. Def. 2: Ascent to the land of Israel, particularly to Jerusalem, on the occasion of the three annual Pilgrim Festivals, or for resettlement in the land.

Ashkenazi: A religious and cultural tradition of those who followed customs which had their origin among German Jews.

Bar Mitzvah: The ceremony held when a boy reaches his religious majority; according to Jewish Law the age of thirteen plus one day.

Bat Brit/Simchat Bat: The welcoming of a daughter into the Covenant.

Bat Mitzvah: The ceremony held when a girl reaches her religious majority; according to Jewish Law the age of twelve plus one day.

Bimah: Raised platform in the center of the synagogue on which the desk for reading the Scroll of the Law is situated.

Bris/Brit Milah: Circumcision; removal of the foreskin in a operation performed on all male Jewish children on the eighth day after birth, and also upon male converts to Judaism.

Chanukah: 8-day holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem after its defilement by Antiochus of Syria.

Confirmation Ceremony: Introduced by Conservative and Reform synagogues, but generally condemned by Orthodox Jewry.

Conservative Judaism: A modern movement which attempts to adapt Jewish law and tradition to modern life on the basis of principles of change inherent in traditional laws and history.

Diaspora: Countries outside Israel.

Get: Jewish divorce.

Haggadah: Passover evening liturgy.

Halachah: Jewish Law.

Havurot: Small-scale prayer and study groups.

Imah: Mother, diminutive for **Aim**.

Judaism: The Jewish religion, also in a wider sense the general characteristics of Jewish values, ethics and mores.

Kaddish: Mourner's prayer.

Knesset: Israeli parliament.

Kol ishah: The voice of a woman.

Mamzer: An illegitimate child, born of a biblically forbidden union.

Mechitzah: Partition, a division in the synagogue separating men from women during public prayer.

Midrash: Contemporary story based on a Jewish female character.

Minyan: Minimum quorum of ten adults required for liturgical purposes (traditional Jews count only males).

Mishnah: A compilation of six books giving the essence of the Oral Law. The final authorized compilation was made in 220 C.E. (Common Era) by Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi.

Naming: Formal religious service marking the birth of a daughter.

Orthodox Judaism: The modern designation for the strictly traditional section of Judaism. It believes in the historical event of revelation and accepts the binding character of Jewish law and the authority of rabbinic sages to interpret and apply this law to modern conditions.

Passover/Pesach: Holiday commemorating the Hebrews' liberation from slavery in Egypt.

Purim: Holiday commemorating the deliverance of the Jews from the massacre plotted by Haman.

Rabbi: A professional title referring to one who is knowledgeable in Judaic tradition and is therefore able to lead and teach the community. These communal officials today assume a multiplicity of roles including educational, sacerdotal, pastoral, and social.

Reconstructionist Judaism: Closely allied to Conservative Judaism, founded by Mordecai Kaplan, this movement emphasizes Jewish peoplehood and civilization. It has a selective approach to Jewish laws and traditions based on current need and understanding of people in their contemporary environment.

Reform Judaism: The modern movement that advocates change and does not accept the binding character of Jewish law. It understands sacred texts and traditions as a special heritage which is the result of human creativity based on a divine inspiration.

Rosh Hashanah: Jewish New Year.

Seder: Passover ceremonial meal.

Sephardi: A religious and cultural tradition of those who followed customs which had their origins in Spain and Portugal.

Shekhinah: The female grammatical version of the Divine Presence.

Simchat Torah: Ceremony where men and children march around the synagogue with the Torah scrolls.

Tashlich: Expiation ceremony on the first day of the New Year.

Tefillah: Prayer.

Torah: The Five Books of Moses, preserved on parchment scrolls in synagogue arks and read publically as part of Jewish worship. Also used in reference to the entire corpus of written and oral teachings.

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Producer

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Executive Producers

Francine E. Zuckerman
Heather A. Marshall

Produced by Kol Ishah Productions Inc.
in co-production with
National Film Board of Canada/Studio D

with the participation of
Telefilm Canada

in association with
TVOntario

with the assistance of
the Non-theatrical Production Fund,
Department of Communications, Canada
and the support of
Zukerman Charitable Foundation
City Express Airlines

Distributed in Canada by
National Film Board of Canada

Distributed in the USA by
Direct Cinema

Color

Screening time: 58 minutes 45 seconds

Order number: C 0189 099

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Francine E. Zuckerman, Producer/Director

A graduate of the McGill University film program, Francine has worked in radio, video and film for the last 10 years. She has produced radio and video programs with wide cultural diversity. She has taught courses on the image of Jewish women in film, coordinated a tour of Canadian films in Israel, and is currently directing and producing a feature drama based on E. M. Broner's novel *A Weave of Women*.

Roushell Goldstein, Co-Director/Editor

A graduate of Carleton University, Roushell has worked as a film editor for the past 15 years. She edited an award-winning documentary *Raoul Wallenberg: Buried Alive*, CBC's *Degrassi Junior High* and the *Live It Up* series. She has most recently edited the NFB *Feminization of Poverty* series, including *No Way! Not Me* and *For Richer, For Poorer* as well as the *Millenium* series on tribal cultures.

Heather Marshall, Co-Executive Producer

Heather was educated at York University with a background in Fine Arts and graduated with an MBA. With banking experience behind her, she became a consultant for Atlantis Films and then went on to Sunrise Films as Vice President of Finance and Business Affairs. As President of Marshall Business Affairs Inc., Heather consulted in the field of television and cinema, working on films for the Owl Centre, Sunrise Film's *Hoover vs. the Kennedys: The Second Civil War* and Jenfilm's Inc., and Toronto Talkies Inc., *Inside Stories*. Most recently, she executive-produced *Shared Rhythm*, and is producing and executive-producing *Sisters of the Road* and *Full Circle*.

Beverly Shaffer, Co-Producer

Beverly studied film at Boston University and then went on to work at PBS in Boston. She began working at the NFB Studio D in 1975. The first project she directed was ten short films called *The Children of Canada*. Other films she directed include the documentaries: *I Want To Be An Engineer*, *The Way It Is*, *Who Should Decide?* and eight dramas in the *Discussion in Bioethics* series. Most recently, Beverly directed *To a Safer Place* and is completing a series called *The Children of Jerusalem*.

AWARDS/FESTIVAL PARTICIPATION

AWARDS — HALF THE KINGDOM

Gemini nominee for Best Documentary and Best Direction 1990

Winner Gold Apple, National Educational Film and Video Festival (California) 1991

Winner Red Ribbon, American Film and Video Festival (Philadelphia) 1991

Special Merit Award, Earth Peace Film Festival (Vermont) 1991

FESTIVAL PARTICIPATION

International London Film Festival, London, England, November 10-29, 1989

Edmonton Women's Film Festival, Edmonton, Alberta, October 22-29, 1989

Films de Femmes, Creteil, France, March 23-April 1, 1990

International Women's Week Cinematheque, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Israel, March, 1990

American Film Institute International Film Festival, Los Angeles, California, April 19-May 3, 1990

Banff Television Festival, Banff, Alberta, June 3-9, 1990

Melbourne International Film Festival, Melbourne, Australia, June 7-9, 1990

Jewish Film Festival, San Francisco, California, Berkeley, California, July 26-August 10, 1990

Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August, 1990

International Independent Tyneside Film Festival, Newcastle Upon Tyne, U.K., October 5-21, 1990

Uppsala International Film Festival, Uppsala, Sweden, October 19-28, 1990

Women in Film Festival, Hollywood, California, October 25-28, 1990

Australian Film Institute Jewish Film Festival, Melbourne, Australia, Sydney, Australia, November, 1990

General Assembly of Jewish Federations, San Francisco, California, November, 1990

International Film Festival for Documentary and Animation Films, Leipzig, Germany, November 23-29, 1990

Association of Jewish Studies, Boston, Massachusetts, December, 1990

Festival International du Film Juif et Israelien, Montpellier, France, December 1-11, 1990

Canadian Film Celebration, Calgary, Alberta, March 13-16, 1991

Rocky Mountain Women's Film Festival, Colorado Springs, Colorado, March 15-16, 1991

American Film and Video Festival, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May, 1991

National Educational Film and Video Festival, Oakland, California, May, 1991

Earth Peace Film Festival, Burlington, Vermont, June/July, 1991

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Adelman, Penina. *Miriam's Well*. Fresh Meadows, New York: Biblio Press, 1986.
- Antler, Joyce. *America and I: Short Stories by American Jewish Women Writers*. Boston: Beacon, 1990.
- Baum, Charlotte; Paula Hyman and Sonya Michel. *The Jewish Woman in America*. New York: Dial, 1976.
- Beck, Evelyn Torton. *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*. Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1982.
- Berkovits, Eliezer. *Jewish Women in Time and Torah*. New York: Ktav, 1990.
- Biale, Rachel. *Women and Jewish Law*. New York: Schocken, 1984.
- Bletter, Diana and Grinker, Lori. *The Invisible Thread*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
- Bridges, *A Journal For Jewish Feminists and Our Friends*, P.O. Box 18437, Seattle, WA, 98118
- Broner, E.M. *Her Mothers*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975.
- _____. *A Weave of Women*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978.
- _____ and Cathy N. Davidson, eds. *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. New York: Ungar, 1980.
- Cantor, Aviva. *The Jewish Woman: 1900-1980. An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Biblio Press, 1981.
- Cohen, Arthur and Mendes-Flohr, Paul. *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*. New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1987.
- Donin, Haim. *To Be a Jew*. New York: Basic Books, 1972.
- Feldman, David. *Birth Control in Jewish Law: Marital Relations, Contraception, and Abortion*. New York: New York University Press, 1968.

Frankiel, Tamar. *The Voice of Sarah - Feminine Spirituality and Traditional Judaism*. Harper, San Francisco, 1990.

Freedman, Marcia. *Exile in the Promised Land*. Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1990.

Goldenberg, Naomi R. *The Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.

_____. *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Resurrection of the Body*. Boston: Beacon, 1990.

Greenberg, Blu. *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981.

Henry, Sondra and Emily Taitz. *Written Out of History*. Fresh Meadows, New York: Biblio Press, 1983.

Heschel, Susannah, ed. *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*. New York: Schocken, 1983.

Kaye/Kantrowitz, Melanie and Klepfisz, Irena, eds. *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Woman's Anthology*, Montpelier, Vermont: Sinister Wisdom Books, 1986.

Landsberg, Michele. *Women and Children First*. Markham, Ont.: Penguin, 1982.

LILITH: The Independent Jewish Women's Magazine. All quarterly issues since 1976. 250 West 57 Street, New York, NY 10107.

Mazow, Julia Wolf. *The Woman Who Lost Her Names: Selected Writings of American Jewish Women*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980.

Neusner, Jacob. *The Way of Torah*. California: Dickinson Publishing Company, 1970.

Ochs, Vanessa. *Words on Fire: One Woman's Journey into the Sacred*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990.

Plaskow, Judith. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.

Pogrebin, Letty Cottin. *Deborah, Golda & Me*. New York: Crown Publishing Inc., 1991.

Schneider, Susan Weidman. *Jewish and Female: Choices and Changes in Our Lives Today*. Simon & Schuster, 1985.

_____. *Intermarriage: The Challenge of Living with Differences Between Christians and Jews*. New York: The Free Press, 1989.

Taking the Fruit: A collection of women's rituals from the Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, San Diego.

Weiss, Avraham. *Women at Prayer*. New York: Ktav, 1990.

Wouk, Herman. *This Is My God*. New York: Dell, 1964.

Zuckerman, Francine, ed. *Half the Kingdom: Seven Jewish Feminists*. Montreal: Vehicle Press, 1992.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Israel

Anou Banou: The Daughters of Utopia, dir. Edna Politi, 85 min., 1982 (JFF)

To Be a Woman Soldier, dir. Shuli Eshel, 50 min., 1981 (Ergo)

Shoot and Cry, dir. Helene Klodawsky, 52 min., 1988 (NFB)

The Tribe, dir. Lilly Rivlin, 38 min., 1983 (JFF)

Holocaust

Dark Lullabies, dirs. Irene Angelico and Abbey Neidik, 81 min., 1985 (NFB)

Lesbian Studies

Separate Skin, dir. Dierdre Fishel, 26 min., 1987 (WMM) Also **Holocaust**.

Bat Sarah: Jews by Choice, 30 min., 1987 (Ain Sof)

One in Ten, 60 min., 1991 (NFB)

Spirituality

Adam's World, dir. Donna Read, 19 min., 1989 (NFB)

Behind the Veil: Nuns, dir. Margaret Wescott, 130 min., 1984 (NFB)

The Burning Times, dir. Donna Read, 57 min., 1990 (NFB)

Faithful Women, a 4-volume series, dir. Kathleen Shannon, 1990 (NFB)

Goddess Remembered, dir. Donna Read, 54 min., 1989 (NFB)

Women's Stories

In Her Own Time, dir. Lynne Littman, 60 min., 1986 (Direct)

Religion

Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition, dirs. Lydia Kukoff and Ilana Bar-Din, 28 min., 1987 (Direct)

Leaving Home: A Family in Transition, dir. Ilana Bar-Din, 28 min., 1981 (Direct)

Ain Sof

Ain Sof Productions
P.O. Box 7224
Berkeley, CA
94707

JFF

Jewish Film Festival
2600 Tenth St.
Berkeley, CA
94710
(415) 548-0556

Direct

Direct Cinema
P.O. Box 69799
Los Angeles, CA
90069
(800) FILMS-4-U

NFB

National Film Board of Canada/Studio D
P.O. Box 6100, Station A
Montreal, Quebec
H3C 2H5
(514) 283-9533

Ergo

Ergo Media Inc.
P.O. Box 2037
Teaneck, NJ
17666
(800) 695-ERGO

WMM

Women Make Movies Inc.
225 Lafayette Street
suite 212
New York, NY 10012
(212) 925-0606

