JEWISH WOMEN CALL FOR CHANGE

The Jewish tradition regarding women, once far ahead of other cultures, has now fallen disgracefully behind in coming to terms with developments of the past century.

Accepting the age-old concept of role differentiation on the basis of sex, Judaism saw woman's role as that of wife, mother, and home-maker. Her ritual obligations were domestic and familial: niddah, chalah, and taharah ke-gimnoseh. Although the woman was entitled for her domestic achievements, and respected as the foundation of the Jewish family, she was never permitted an active role in the synagogue, court, or house of study. These limitations on the life-patterns open to women, appropriate or even progressive for the rabbinate and medieval periods, are entirely unacceptable to us today.

The social position and self-image of women have changed radically in recent years. It is now universally accepted that women are equal to men in intellectual capacity, leadership ability and spiritual depth. The Conservative movement has tacitly acknowledged this fact by demanding that their female children be educated alongside the males--up to the level of rabbinical school. To educate women and deny them the opportunity to act from this knowledge is an affront to their intelligence, talents and integrity.

As products of Conservative congregations, religious schools, the Reform Camps, UJW, and the Sunday school, we feel this tension acutely. We are deeply committed to Judaism, but cannot find adequate expression for our total needs and concerns in existing Jewish social and charitable organizations, such as Sisterhood, Hadassah, etc.

Furthermore, the single woman--a new reality in Jewish life--is almost totally excluded from the organized Jewish community, which views women solely as daughters, wives, and mothers. The educational institutions of the Conservative movement have helped women recognize their intellectual, social and spiritual potential. If the movement then denies women opportunities to demonstrate these capabilities as adults, it will force them to turn from the synagogue, and to find fulfillment elsewhere.

It is not enough to say that Judaism views women as separate but equal, nor to point to Judaism's past superiority over other cultures in its treatment of women. We've had enough of apologies, enough of Ebrurah, Dvorah, and Esther; enough of 'PA ADI?

It is time that:
- women be granted membership in synagogues
- women be counted in the minyan
- women be allowed full participation in religious observances--

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women be recognized as witnesses before Jewish law
women be allowed to initiate divorce
women be permitted and encouraged to attend Rabbinical and Cantorial schools, and to perform Rabbinical and Cantorial functions in synagogues
women be encouraged to join decision-making bodies, and to assume professional leadership roles, in synagogues and in the general Jewish community
women be considered as bound to fulfill all mitzvot equally with men.

For three thousand years, one-half the Jewish people have been excluded from full participation in Jewish communal life. We call for an end to the second-class status of women in Jewish life.

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