FROM THE EDITORS

Kol ha olam kulo gesher tza’me’od,
v’haikar lo l’fakhed k’lal

The whole world is a narrow bridge,
the main thing is to be unafraid.
Reb Nachman of Bratslav

Two manuscripts came in to us quoting these words. Was it the title of the journal which inspired thoughts of this song (we weren’t thinking of this song when we chose the name) or is the image of a narrow bridge so apt to the position of Jews and feminists today that it has simultaneously appeared in many minds? And yet the bridges in the minds of our editors were visions of strength, more like the Williamsburg or Golden Gate than the swaying rope of Reb Nachman’s gesher.

Welcome to the first issue of BRIDGES: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends. Our journal emerges from the United States during an extended wave of political conservatism, a decline in standard of living and quality of life, and erosion of civil liberties, especially for people of color and women. It is also a time when, for complex reasons which we hope to explore, many Jews are involved in a difficult search for deeper understandings of the meaning and future of Jewish identity.

The founding editors of BRIDGES met through our activism in New Jewish Agenda. The nature of the organization, with chapters in fifty North American cities, allowed us to envision a project national in scope, yet rooted in local communities. We come from both coasts and the Midwest; we range in age from 25 to 60. We differ in our religious practice and commitment to Jewish secularism, though we are all deeply concerned with meaningful Jewish life.

Featured in this issue are three solicited retrospective essays which chronicle aspects of Jewish feminism over the last decade. Alisa Solomon, a drama critic for the Village Voice, addresses Jewish feminist organizing around Middle East peace issues; historian Faith Rogow explores Jewish lesbian-feminist development; and JEB, a longtime documenter of Jewish, lesbian, and feminist activism contributes a photo-essay. Future issues will feature other retrospectives including one on Jewish feminist liturgy and ritual. We solicited several historical pieces in an effort to represent the many strands of Jewish feminist activity; we hope BRIDGES will help create connections among women living in different parts of the country and involved in different aspects of Jewish feminism.

At BRIDGES we see literary and creative work as essential to our politics. We will regularly reserve nearly half of our pages for visual art, poetry, fiction and song; essays and other writing will make up the remainder. We believe this first issue of BRIDGES achieves an extraordinary integration of culture and political activism, exemplified in “Some Pieces of Jewish Left,” the opening story by Melanie Kaye/ Kantrowitz which utilizes the freedom of fiction to convey a realistic picture (there are no answers, just lots of questions) of Jewish women activists. We are particularly proud that much of the poetry and song in this issue came unsolicited from women who have not yet been widely published.

BRIDGES is proud to join the ranks of the many publications, past and present, which articulate alternative visions of re-evaluating and re-building the structures of society. We feel our unique contribution comes from our firm footing in the feminist, lesbian, Jewish, and progressive worlds, and our format, which permits publication of in-depth pieces that cannot be published elsewhere because of their length. In her review of Nice Jewish Girls, The Tribe of Dina and Twice Blessed Joan Nestle gives a brief overview of the history of lesbian-feminist publishing. BRIDGES itself has grown out of this publishing matrix, yet our specifically Jewish focus commits us to pushing the boundaries of that milieu, as our radical feminist approach expands the definitions of what it means to be Jewish.

We also see ourselves as a specifically Jewish voice in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial women’s movement. In so doing, we place ourselves alongside those feminists and...
progressives who take seriously the impact of racism in the United States and abroad, not
only on people of color but on entire societies. For Jews, located as we are in the tension
filled spaces in the economy and society, racism has had still unexplored destabilizing
effects. We hope to extend, through essays,
dialogues and reports of activist work, the
understanding of racism’s continuing, inexo-
orable presence and how it saps and under-
mines us all.

It is essential to our vision that diversity
of experience be made vivid in these pages.
BRIDGES will acknowledge that Jewish
feminists come from all regions of the coun-
try, from the full range of Jewish back-
grounds. We hope to challenge assumptions
and stereotypes by publishing writers and
artists from the Midwest and the South, from
working class and non-European cultures. We
believe that a truer sense of Jewish identity
will take shape when the specifics of our
Jewish lives, including our separations from
Jewish culture, are named and acknowl-
edged. Feminist transformation is enabled
when each woman’s reality is brought to
light; BRIDGES is a forum for such interac-
tion among Jewish feminists.

Bridges are connectors, spans between
deeply rooted foundations, bridges allow
communication and transactions. And, as the
October 17, 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake
showed us, bridges can be among our most
vulnerable structures. That vulnerability, and
that strength, are needed between Jews living
in cultures around the world, between us and
Jews of past generations, between American
 Jews and people of color, among the move-
ments for social transformation and among
feminists whose foundations have been built
independently of each other. BRIDGES
reaches out to all communities engaged in the
enduring labor of love, and desire for a
livable society, which is called political
struggle.

— Ruth Atkin, Elly Bulkin, Rita Falbel, Clare
Kinberg, Ruth Kraut, Adrienne Rich, Laurie
White

of BRIDGES: A Jewish Feminist Journal.