



A BEGINNING

For three days last February, 450 women met together in New York to talk about our pride and problems as Jewish women. We listened to our sisters talk about our history, our options if we choose to be observant Jews, our role as volunteers in the Jewish Community, our inequality in Jewish movement organizations, our joys and troubles growing up in the Jewish family.

In between listening to speakers, we talked to each other, learned what was happening to our sisters in other cities, gained new friends and renewed acquaintances, and talked about what we wanted to see happen.

Some of us were disappointed that such a great emphasis was given to Jewish women in the religious realm, that more feminist and political issues were played down. So we held a panel to discuss such topics as: sexism in radical Jewish organizations, the loneliness of gay Jewish women, Jewish women in the secular feminist and radical movements, and the paucity of options for life in the Jewish community after graduation from college. Afterwards various women in the "audience" described what was happening in their communities, their lives. A consensus was reached that we wanted and needed to keep in contact with each other via some umbrella organization or form of communication. Later at the publications workshop it was decided to start a newsletter to be published in Chicago (guess who opened her mouth to volunteer getting it together?)

For me the best part of the conference was meeting and talking to many beautiful Jewish women, and feeling and giving support to each other, but there were disappointments as well. The conference, being held in a hotel in downtown New York, first of all made it difficult for women from the midwest and west coast to attend, and secondly made the cost prohibitive to many women (I have still not received the travel subsidy I was promised).

On Saturday afternoon Dr. Zena Blau, a sociologist, talked about her research concerning

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"The Jewish Family" and claimed that the attitudes of the educated middle-class were more enlightened than the rest of the population. From the back of the room a woman yelled, "This is an outrage!" and there was a lot of yelling back and forth.

A group of working class gay women who have been part of the Jewish women's movement for several years had come to the conference just for the afternoon as they had been unable to afford the cost of registration. After much yelling and interruptions they were allowed to speak and told of their grievances. They were angry that the cost of the conference excluded working class women. They were further angry that none of the main speakers were gay or even spoke to gay issues.

In response to the money issue, Sheryl Baron, conference coordinator explained that she and others had spent many months schlepping from one Jewish organization to another trying to raise money for the conference. However, the organizations saw the conference as too radical, were skeptical of its success, and refused to contribute. However, she did not adequately explain why such a conference had to be held in a hotel.

Thereafter the assembly broke into small discussion groups; many affected by the preceding confrontation, dealt with class issues or sexuality. The discussion group I attended was the most intense of the weekend for me. We talked about our own sexuality, our attractions towards women, towards men, our uptightness with our bodies and with others.

All in all the weekend could have fared better with less sitting and listening to speakers and more small discussion groups, with a less ostentatious meeting place and more working class women attending. The chance to meet and talk with Jewish women struggling with the same issues we face in Chicago was nonetheless valuable.

(See page 8 for plans for an upcoming conference of midwest Jewish women)

The first issue of the newsletter, entitled "Lilith's Rib, Jewish Women's Movement Newsletter," has been published. It contains excerpts from three women's haggadahs produced this Passover (see excerpts from one on page 8 this issue), news from Madison and L. A. women, and other items. To receive the first issue and be placed on the mailing list for future issues, send your name and address to Lilith's Rib, 815 W. Wrightwood, Chicago, Ill. 60614. A donation of at least \$5.00 to cover costs of the first two issues is requested.

--Maralee

"A Beginning," article by Maralee Gordon about the first National Conference of Jewish Women, February 1973. Published in *Chutzpah: A Jewish Liberation Journal* 1973. Courtesy of Sheryl Baron Nestel and Rabbi Maralee Gordon.