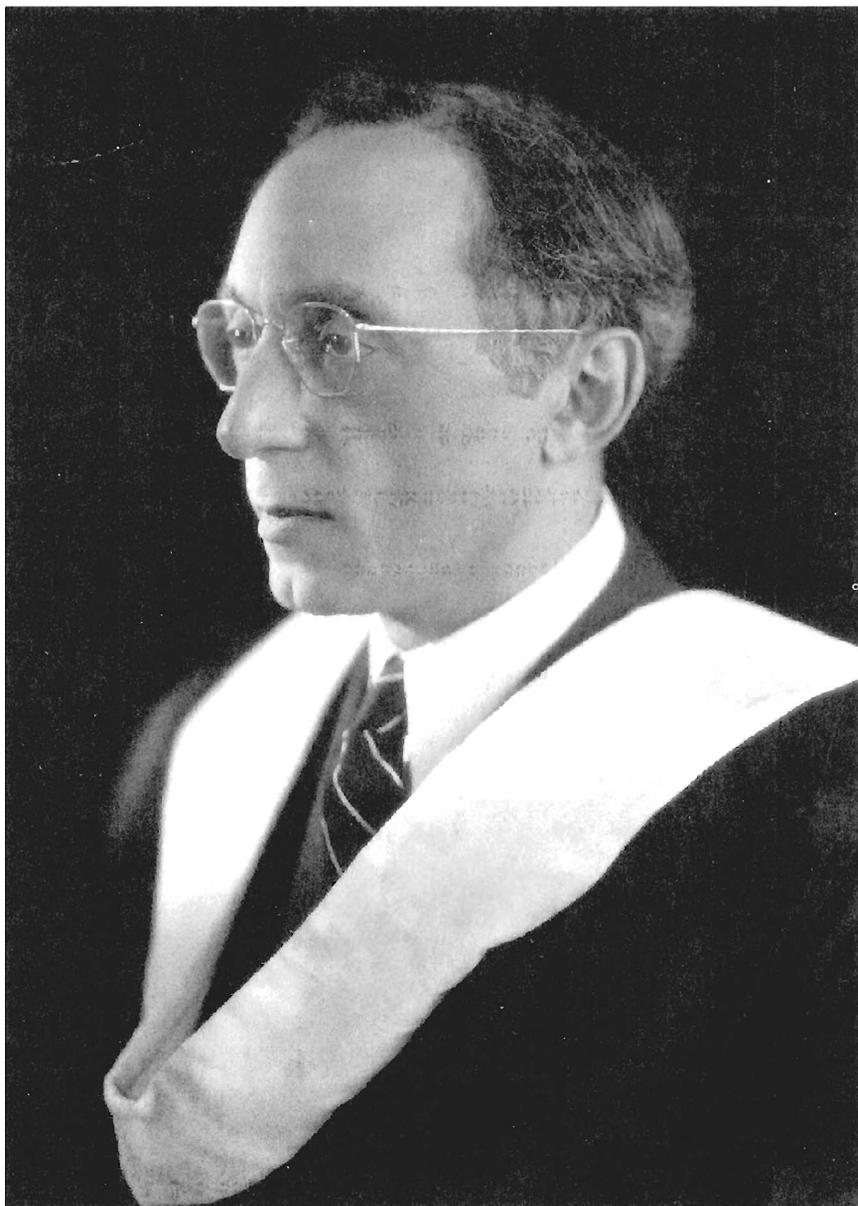


The Movement for Equal Rights for Women in Judaism as Reflected in the Writings of Rabbi David Aronson

David Golinkin

The movement for equal rights for women in American Jewry is usually said to have begun with *Ezrat Nashim*, founded primarily by Conservative Jewish women in late 1971.¹ But as usually occurs with any new social and religious phenomenon, the roots of this movement in the United States actually began decades earlier. Some might trace it to the abolition of the *mehitzah* and separate seating which began at Anshe Emeth synagogue in Albany, New York, in 1851,² or to the resolution of the Reform Central Conference of American Rabbis to ordain women which occurred in 1922.³ Others might date it to the “invention” of the *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony by Mordecai Kaplan in that very same year⁴ or to the decision of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement in 1955 to allow *aliyot* for women.⁵ Yet, regardless of when the movement for the equality of Jewish women actually started, it is rare to find Conservative rabbis who actively advocated such changes before the 1970s.⁶ Rabbi David Aronson was such an advocate. He lived for almost a century (1894–1988), and during the last sixty-six years of his life he devoted eight articles and one letter to the subject of the status of women in Jewish law and life. These pieces offer us a fascinating glimpse into his personal odyssey as an advocate of the equality of women in Judaism as well as direct evidence of the revolutionary changes that have transpired in the lives of American Jewish women in this century.

At first glance, Rabbi David Aronson would seem to have been an unlikely candidate to advocate the equality of Jewish women. Born in Vitebsk, Russia, in 1894, he was a descendant of both the Gaon of Vilna and Rabbi Abraham Danzig, author of the *Hayyei Adam*, a major work of Jewish law.⁷ After immigrating to the United States with his family



Rabbi David Aronson
(courtesy of Bertha Aronson)

in 1906, Aronson studied at Yeshivat R. Yitzhak Elhanan, earned his B.A. from New York University in 1916, and was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1919. Following his ordination, he held pulpits in Salt Lake City (1920–21) and Duluth, Minnesota (1922–24).

In 1924, he became rabbi of Beth El synagogue in Minneapolis, a post he occupied with distinction for thirty-five years. During those years, he served the Rabbinical Assembly as a member of the Committee on Jewish Law (later renamed the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards; 1933, 1940–41, 1947–56), as chairman of the Membership Committee (1946–48), and as president (1948–50). He received his D.H.L. from the Seminary in 1946. Upon retiring from the pulpit rabbinate in 1959, he moved to Los Angeles, where he served as a professor of rabbinics at the University of Judaism for many years.⁸

"Woman's Position in Israel"

Rabbi Aronson's first foray into our topic was in an article entitled "Woman's Position in Israel" published in 1922.⁹ In it, he reacts to the decision of the Central Conference of American Rabbis at their annual convention that "In view of these Jewish teachings and in keeping with the spirit of our age, and the traditions of our Conference, we declare that women cannot justly be denied the privilege of ordination."¹⁰

Aronson proceeds to give a thorough survey of the status of Jewish women in the Talmud and in medieval times. He discusses the talmudic preference for sons over daughters, the attitude toward wives and marriage, the generally positive attitude toward women in the Bible;¹¹ the talmudic attitudes regarding women and time-bound commandments, women as witnesses, women as *shochtim* (kosher slaughterers), and Jewish women's education. His tone is objective for the most part, though one paragraph indicates that he was a product of his time. In discussing the permissibility of women wearing *tzitzit* (fringes), Aronson writes:

The woman, to be sure, could do the same, but that would require her to wear a garment not necessitated by either convenience or style, and—well, such things are not popular with her. A new, stylish dress may inspire a woman with the religious feeling to come to hear the sermon, but the best sermon

will hardly inspire her to modify her favorite style. She may make dress her religion, but she will not let religion make her dress. The average woman will dress for church, but she will not let the church dress her:¹²

Toward the end of the article, he asserts that American Jewish women are more interested in Judaism than American Jewish men. Rabbi Aronson continues:

Relatively speaking, the American Jewess takes a greater interest than her brother in the intellectual, spiritual and all so-called "higher things of life." A similar phenomenon may be noted in the non-Jewish world. Probably it is a result of the release of woman's energies pent up for ages. Whatever the cause, it is a fact seen all over the country and among people of all classes and conditions. It is true of the Temple as of the synagogue sisterhood, not to mention philanthropic institutions. In New York it can be noted at the Friday evening or Sunday morning lectures, in congregational study-groups, in most of the Young Israel and Institutional Synagogue activities, in the cultural clubs, in the Seminary Teachers' Institute Extension department, in the outings of the Mizrahi young people's organizations¹³

The most active and comprehensive Jewish organization in America is probably the Council of Jewish Women, and the most outstanding achievements of the United Synagogue of America are the activities of its Women's League. "Ladies first" is becoming more than a chivalrous remark in American Jewish life. There is no doubt that, should any of our theological schools extend the right of ordination to women, as the Conference suggested, there will be no lack of candidates.

Does that mean that many of our pulpits will soon be filled by women? Not necessarily. Life is not all logical; it is also physiological and psychological. Theoretically, in Reform congregations that have family pews and a mixed choir, and where the women congregants participate equally with the men in every phase of the service, there can be no logical objection to a woman-rabbi.¹⁴ Practically, however, a woman who wants to

live a normal life, will find too many physical difficulties to prevent her from assuming such an office.¹⁵

Aronson was echoing here the debate at the CCAR convention: how could a woman rabbi continue to function as a wife and mother?¹⁶ He himself did not take a stand; he simply asserted that the idea was not practical.

The Agunah Problem

We have scant written evidence of what Rabbi Aronson thought about the role of women in Jewish life during the next twenty-seven years,¹⁷ but an important letter has been preserved from 1933. At that time, Aronson was a member of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law, which wrote responsa and gave halakhic guidance to the Conservative Movement. He was apparently asked to react to one of the Committee's many proposals to alleviate the plight of the agunah, or "chained woman," who could not remarry because her husband refused to give her a *get*, or Jewish bill of divorce.¹⁸ He replied:

I cannot discuss that without writing a long paper on the subject. I would plead with the committee to take some action to ameliorate the present situation. Judaism cannot afford to uphold a standard that is inferior to that of the general environment. Nor can we as rabbis continue to defend a status quo which as individuals we do not consider morally right.

The people are progressively taking this problem in their own hands. The synagogues do not exclude those who violate some of these traditional requirements. Jewish public opinion is not in sympathy with the old regulations which have become unjust under changed conditions. The spirit of Judaism demands that the rabbis assert themselves in this moral crisis.¹⁹

We see here that Aronson gives three different reasons for alleviating the plight of the agunah: to maintain as high a moral standard as our gentile neighbors; to prevent the people from taking the law into their own hands; and to do what is morally right according to the

"spirit of Judaism." As we shall see below, he himself did not propose a specific halakhic solution until 1951, but his discontent with the status quo is already quite evident in 1933.

Women at Prayer

In 1949, Rabbi Aronson returned to our topic in his "President's Column" published in the Bulletin of the Rabbinical Assembly in December of that year.²⁰ By this point, he did not merely lament what he viewed as a halakhic inequity but had taken some bold action in his own congregation. His report was so revolutionary as to be worth reprinting in full:

It happened! A woman chanted the Kiddush in the presence of a large congregation at the late Friday night service. Not only that, but on the Sabbath morning following at 11:00 o'clock, women conducted a second Minyan. The women took charge of the service while the men who had the courage remained to watch the Kiddush, the new experience in the history of the Synagogue. There was an abridged Shaharit conducted by women dressed in white robes and skull caps. They chanted the prayer before the Ark, read out of the Scroll with the traditional chant, called up for Aliyot Bat-Kohen, Bat-Levi, etc., chanted the Maftir better than most men could, blessed the new month, and let two members of the Bat-Mitzvah class lead in the chanting of the Mussaf service. O yes, there was a short sermon on the sidra of the week given by a woman too.

What was the reaction of the men? Said one of the venerable members, a former president of the congregation: "It was a service done so beautifully, with dignity, knowledge and understanding. It was a profound religious experience. I am all for it." Said an old Hassid, the father of the woman who read the Torah: "When a Congregation can produce those who can participate in that kind of service so sincerely and devotedly, then we, too, can see that it is good." Said a mere man: "It is a revolutionary act. Now women will want the Aliyot." He then added: "Perhaps this will spur the men to guard their honors and to attend the synagogues more regularly."

It happened in Minneapolis in connection with the 25th anniversary observance of the Beth El Women's League. It is the sign of the times. Some day it will reach your congregation. Are you ready to resist it, welcome it, encourage it? Whatever your position, you better begin thinking seriously about it. The role of women in the synagogue presents a growing challenge which rabbis will not be able to ignore much longer.

We see here that Rabbi David Aronson was years and even decades ahead of his time. Women are obligated by the Torah to recite the Kiddush and may therefore recite it for men according to the Talmud and the *Shulhan Arukh*;²¹ but he was probably one of the first modern rabbis to actually allow this in practice.²² More importantly, Aronson was describing here the first women's prayer group over twenty-five years before such groups were "invented" by Jewish women in the 1970s!²³ Lastly, he prophetically predicted that "the role of women in the synagogue presents a growing challenge which rabbis will not be able to ignore much longer." Indeed, in 1955, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative movement decided to allow aliyot for women, which eventually led to further leniencies in the 1970s.²⁴

Meanwhile, two years after this column, in 1951, Aronson returned to the plight of the agunah, which, as we have seen, had been bothering him for a long time. In a responsum entitled "Kedat Moshe Veyisrael," discussing the situation arising when a husband obtained a civil divorce but refused to give his wife a *get*, thus rendering her an agunah, he advocated that the *get* could be issued by a Bet Din, or Jewish Court of Law.²⁵ Aronson's proposal was not accepted;²⁶ but it testifies, once again, to his growing advocacy on behalf of Jewish women.

Over the years, Aronson and his colleague Rabbi Kassel Abelson continued to look for ways to expand the role of women in the synagogue. As a result, in 1952 or 1953, they introduced the Shabbat morning Bat Mitzvah.²⁷

In 1954, Aronson again entered the fray, in the controversy over mixed seating at Adath Israel Congregation in Cincinnati. On March 3, 1954, 289 out of 413 members present voted to allow optional mixed seating in one section of the synagogue. Nine members objected, and as a result, the controversy was submitted to a private

court of three judges for binding arbitration.²⁸ Aronson was asked to address the question as to whether mixed seating was according to the "forms and traditions of Orthodox" Jews.²⁹

In his response Aronson showed that there were at least five different positions among American Orthodox rabbis on the permissibility of mixed seating. Furthermore, he very carefully refuted Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's famous letter on the subject, which declared that "the separation of the sexes in the synagogue is a basic tenet in our faith ... and constitutes a Pentateuchic injunction (*issur d'oraita*), which can never be abandoned by any legislative act.... What was decreed by God can never be undone by human hand."³⁰ Aronson demonstrated that the biblical verse in question, quoted in Sukkah 51b, was from Zechariah and hence could not be forbidden by the Torah. Moreover, he concluded, Soloveitchik's use of Deuteronomy 23:16 had "no bearing on the question before us."³¹

Another nineteen years passed. It is now 1973 and Rabbi Abelson, Aronson's successor at Beth El, wanted to start counting women in the minyan. Abelson enlisted the help of Rabbi Aronson, who was in town for the High Holidays, and he in turn helped convince the board of Beth El that it was permissible to count women in the minyan.³²

A few years later, Aronson began a campaign to include the mother's name when calling someone to the Torah, filling out ketubot (marriage contracts), naming children at a berit (circumcision), reciting a Mi Shebeirach or El Male prayer, and on a gravestone. He introduced this idea as a resolution at the Rabbinical Assembly convention in 1973 and in an article entitled "And Her Name Shall Be Called in Israel," which appeared in *Women's League Outlook* in the winter of 1973-74.³³ In this article, Aronson suggested that the mother be given equal recognition with the father in the identity of their child, and that her name be used, together with the father's, in all religious records.

Regarding the use of the mother's name for aliyot, he explained:

To the question what is the *Zekhut* [merit] of women, the Talmud replies, it is their bringing their children to the house of study [Berakhot 17a]. Certainly it is the mother in our families today who carries the burden of seeing that her children attend Reli-

gious School. Should her name not be identified with her child when he is called up to read the Torah?

He further asserted that the name of the mother should be used on tombstones, following the practice on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem for those who died in the defense of Israel. He concluded by stating that the proposed change "represents a standard and not a Halakhah. There are no Halakhic objections to these changes. They may be introduced locally or individually."

Aronson's efforts bore fruit. In 1973 and 1974, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards recommended that liturgists formulate and circulate liturgical formulae incorporating the mother's name, which could then be adopted or rejected by local rabbis. Later on, in 1978, the same committee adopted the following resolution: "The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards encourages the use of both the name of the father and the mother in identifying an individual." It was stressed that this was based on a suggestion made by Rabbi David Aronson.³⁴

Women's Ordination

One year later, Aronson was forced by circumstances to return to the very same question he had addressed in 1922 — the ordination of women as rabbis. But now it was not the Reform Movement, the CCAR, and HUC discussing the question, but the Conservative Movement, the Rabbinical Assembly, and the Jewish Theological Seminary. In "Women in Jewish Life and Law," published in the *Jewish Spectator* in the summer of 1979, Rabbi Aronson reprised much of what he had written in 1922.³⁵ The major difference was his conclusion. As we saw above, in 1922 he pointed out the sociological obstacles to women's ordination without taking a clear position. In 1979, he was still aware of the sociological obstacles to be overcome within the Conservative Movement:

The revised constitution of the Rabbinical Assembly does not bar women from membership and thus the door is open for the ordination of women. There is no doubt, however, that the age-old mental conditioning will continue for some time. As

matters stand now in the Conservative Movement, there are differences of opinion among the rabbis and the lay people, both among men and women.³⁶

But by now he was certain that women would indeed be ordained, either by the Seminary or by an official committee of the Rabbinical Assembly or by individual members of the Rabbinical Assembly. Thus he concluded as follows:

That does not mean that the female rabbis will immediately be called to rabbinic posts. As in all newly opened professions, their acceptance will be a slow process. But there are many other fields where women rabbis can serve – in Hillel Foundations, teachers in academic institutions, directors of social service institutions.

Life is not always logical. The gap between the ideal and the status quo is not readily bridged. It is not easy to overcome the conditioning of the long centuries when men controlled the synagogue and the Jewish community. But it is one of the fundamental doctrines of Judaism that humans are teachable and can attain new moral, ethical, and spiritual insights. It is in the light of this insight that we note the growing recognition in the Jewish community that woman like man is created in the image of God, and has the right to equal opportunity for studying so as to assume the responsibilities and functions associated today with rabbinic ordination.

The gates of new insight, like the gates of repentance, are never closed.³⁷

Four more years pass, and it is now the spring of 1983, six months before the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary votes to ordain women on October 24, 1983.³⁸ Rabbi Robert Gordis asks Rabbi Aronson to participate in a symposium in *Judaism* magazine on "Women as Rabbis." Here Aronson, at the age of eighty-nine, finally grabs the bull by the horns and tackles the issue of women in Judaism head-on from a philosophical and theological point of view. In his article, entitled "Creation in God's Likeness,"³⁹ Aronson surveyed some of the indications from Genesis that women were not afforded the same dignity as men. He explained the disadvantage of women

in the realm of divorce as well as Professor Saul Lieberman's solution.⁴⁰ He further adduced the example of Takkanat Rabbenu Gershom, the ban against polygamy enacted by Rabbenu Gershom in the eleventh century, to show "that the takkanah [enactment of a regulation supplementing Torah law] has historically been used in situations dealing with the status of women."⁴¹

He then proceeded to tackle the question of women's ordination.

Women students at the Jewish Theological Seminary may elect to study the same subjects as do the men. The question on the agenda is whether these women, upon completion of such studies, are entitled to ordination. The challenge of the radically changed ethical standards of our day, recognizing the just claim of women to equal rights, makes a discussion of the details of the traditional rules restricting women's rights quite irrelevant. To argue that today's women are less qualified than men to act as witnesses is absurd. The old rules simply have no basis in reality in either the Jewish or the general society of our day.

Instead of pursuing an inexhaustible or a prolonged process of interpretation and reinterpretation of the previous restrictions which had been imposed upon the woman, let us present the ordination of women as a takkanah required by the ethical standards of our day. Tradition never limited the authority to make takkanot to any moment in history. On the contrary, it is the right and responsibility of every generation of rabbis when the needs of the time require it. Tradition teaches us that while previous scholars should be consulted, they have no veto power....

According to the Biblical verses the woman, too, is created in the image of God. Therefore, she may not be kept in a subservient position and treated as a minor whose testimony is not to be accepted and, ipso facto, not be qualified to act as a judge on a Bet Din. Moreover, she has become aware of the fact that she, too, is precious in the sight of God and she justly demands equal rights and responsibilities. We are living in a time when we may well say: "Precious is woman, for she was created in the image of God; she is especially precious because '*noda'at lah*,' she has become aware of it."⁴²

Moreover, a great historic event occurred in our day and we cannot and may not ignore its consequences — Medinat Yisrael reborn. It is governed by a Knesset consisting of parties with differing opinions. In that Knesset, a woman was elected Prime Minister, and the Religious Parties did not resign from the Knesset though they doubtless disapproved of a woman occupying such a high position in government. Thus, Medinat Yisrael recognized the right of a woman to sign a Declaration of War or Peace but, obviously, Golda Meir's signature on a ketubah would still not be accepted. It is a standard both untenable and irrational.

The deeper insights into the meaning of a human created in the image of God, the changed attitude of the civilized world toward the position of women, and her emerging role in Medinat Yisrael — all these have made it imperative for us to make a takkanah to grant qualified women ordination as rabbis with all the traditional authority inherent in this title. It is not only a *mizvat aseh she-hazman gerama* — a positive commandment contingent on the time — but it has become urgent by the spirit of our time. It is a takkanah long overdue.⁴³

In 1987, at the age of ninety-three, Rabbi Aronson returned to our theme one last time in an article entitled "From Rib to Rabbi: The Evolving Status of the Woman in Jewish Lore, Life and Law," in which he reviewed many of the themes from his previous articles.⁴⁴

In his concluding paragraph, he prophetically raised one of the difficult challenges posed by Jewish feminism which has yet to be properly addressed.

The evolving position of the Jewish woman from housewife to co-breadwinner is presenting a more serious problem than that presented by the dissolution of volunteerism in Jewish institutions. We are confronted by a challenge to the very stability of the home and the training and the education of children. This is not only a Jewish problem, but the spirit of Judaism can be transmitted only by the home and its rituals. Its traditional timetable is endangered. This must become the supreme and most urgent concern of the family, the Synagogue and rabbinic bodies.⁴⁵

In conclusion, we can learn much from Rabbi David Aronson's sixty-five-year struggle with the role of women in Judaism. First of all, we see that *Ezrat Nashim* and the ordination of women were the culmination of a lengthy process begun in 1922 or before. Secondly, we learn that the process of "liberating" Jewish women was slow and gradual. It led from abolishing the *mehitzah* to Torah study to dealing with the plight of the *agunah* to *aliyot* for women to the ordination of women. Lastly, we learn much about the personality and flexibility of Aronson himself. His first revolutionary article about a women's *tefillah* group appeared in 1949 when he was fifty-five years old. In 1979, at age eighty-five, he had still not stated in writing that he was a full-blown advocate of women's ordination.⁴⁶ Only in 1983, at age eighty-nine, did Rabbi Aronson state clearly and unequivocally that he was in favor of women's ordination. Thus, David Aronson can serve as a model of a rabbi who is willing to continue learning and expanding his horizons as he grows older. As Rabbi Ishmael b'rebbe Yossi taught: "*Talmidei hakhamim*—the older they get, the wiser they get."⁴⁷

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Notes

The attitudes toward women in Judaism described in this article are those of Rabbi Aronson and do not necessarily reflect my own point of view. This article is an expanded version of my introductory remarks at the Fifth Annual Rabbi David Aronson Memorial Lecture sponsored by the Seminary of Judaic Studies (the Bet Midrash) in Jerusalem on November 8, 1994. The featured speaker was Prof. Alice Shalvi, who spoke on "Different But Equal: The Shifting Paradigm of Jewish Feminism." My thanks to Chancellor Ismar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminary, who was present and who urged me to publish my remarks. I would also like to thank those who read the article and contributed corrections and a number of additional references: Dr. Debbie Weissman of Kerem and the Seminary of Judaic Studies in Jerusalem; Mrs. Bertha Aronson, Rabbi Aronson's widow; Rabbi Kassel Abelson, his longtime colleague at Beth El in Minneapolis; Prof. Abraham Peck, managing editor of the *American Jewish Archives*; and the anonymous reader appointed by the American Jewish Archives.

Finally, I would like to thank Julie Miller of the Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism at the Jewish Theological Seminary. After I had completed this article, she informed me that Rabbi Aronson's papers had been sorted by the Center and were in the Rare Book Room of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. I read through the relevant files (David Aronson Papers [hereafter: DAP], Box 5, Folders 1–3) and have added all appropriate references in the notes.

1. See Anne Lapidus Lerner, *American Jewish Year Book* 77 (1977): 3–38; Steven M. Cohen, "American Jewish Feminism: A Study in Conflicts and Compromises," *American Behavioral Scientist* 23, no. 4 (March–April 1980): 524–526, 548 ff.; and Sylvia Barack Fishman, *American Jewish Year Book* 69 (1989): 9 ff.; idem, *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (New York, 1993), pp. 7 ff. My thanks to Prof. Tirzah Meachem of the University of Toronto for the last reference.

2. See Jonathan Sama, "The Debate Over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue," in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 363–394.

3. See CCAR *Yearbook* 32 (1922): 51, 156–177. The latter pages were reprinted in Walter Jacob, ed., *American Reform Responsa* (New York, 1983), pp. 25–43.

4. See Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit, 1993), pp. 301–302. "Invented" is in quotation marks because various types of Bat Mitzvah celebrations were already practiced by Jews in Italy, France, Jerusalem, and Baghdad at least as early as the nineteenth century. For Italy, see Aharon Cohen, *Zeved Habato* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 26–29. For France and Jerusalem, see Rabbi Abraham Mussafia (19th cent.), quoted in *Noam* 7 (5724): 4–5; Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim, *Responsa Yein Hatov* (Jerusalem, 5739): p. 241, from whence it is quoted by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, *She'elot Uteshuvoth Yehaveh Da'at*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 5738), p. 110. For Baghdad, see R. Joseph Haim of Baghdad, (1833–1909), *Ben Ish Hai*, Parashat Re'eh, no. 17.

5. See *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* (hereafter cited as PRA) 19 (1955):168–190 and 33–41.

6. There were, however, Reform rabbis and women who advocated greater participation or equal rights for women in Judaism as early as a century before Ezrat Nashim. See, for example, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, "Women in the Synagogue," *American Israelite* 27, no. 1162 (September 8, 1876): 4; Rabbi Emil B. Hirsch, "Women in the Pulpit," *Reform Advocate* 6, no. 13 (November 11, 1893): 201–202; Rosa Sonneschein, "Editorial: The First Convention of the Council of Jewish Women," *American Jewess* 4, no. 3 (December 1896): 137–138; Katherina von Kellenbach, "'God Does Not Oppress Any Human Being': The Life and Thought of Rabbi Regina Jonas," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 39 (1994): 213–225. My thanks to the anonymous reader and to Prof. Peck for these references.

7. See the short biographical sketch which appears before his article "Woman's Position in Israel," *Jewish Forum* 5, no. 7 (August 1922): 260. Also see PRA 8 (1941–44): 388–389, where Aronson explained his exact relationship to the Gaon of Vilna.

8. This biographical sketch is based on the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 3, cols. 494–495; Pamela Nadell, *Conservative Judaism in America: A Bibliographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (New York, 1988), pp. 35–36; and Rabbi Kassel Abelson, PRA 51 (1989): 295–297.

9. *Jewish Forum* 5, no. 7 (August 1922): 260–264 and no. 9 (October 1922): 376–381. There is, as yet, no complete bibliography of Aronson's writings. He authored an introduction to Judaism entitled *The Jewish Way of Life* (New York, 1946, 1957) and as well a pamphlet entitled *Torah: The Life of a Jew* (New York, 1964). Some of his articles are listed in the index to PRA in vol. 15 (1951): 255; the index to the *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1927–1968*, pp. 26–27; Doris Noveck, "An Index of Conservative Judaism, Volumes IX–VII," p. 2; and "Index of Conservative Judaism, Volumes XVIII–XXXII," *Conservative Judaism* 31, no. 4 (Summer 1977): 45.

10. See *CCAR Year Book* (n. 4 above): 51.

11. For a similar, more recent assessment, see Rabbi Theodore Friedman, "The Shifting Role of Women from the Bible to the Talmud," *Judaism* 36, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 479–487; David Solinkin, ed., *Be'er Tuvia: From the Writings of Rabbi Theodore Friedman* (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 47–57.

12. *Jewish Forum* 5, no. 9, p. 377.

13. It is worth noting that in an address to the National Convention of Hadassah in 1932, Mordecai Kaplan gave a very different assessment of women's involvement in Jewish education. He claimed that since Jewish women received little Jewish education, they goaded their husbands to apostasy and urged them to join the Christian Science Church. He stated that only the Zionist work of Hadassah had started to reverse this trend. See Mordecai Kaplan, "What the American Jewish Woman Can Do for Adult Jewish Education," *Jewish Education* 4, no. 3 (October–December 1932): 139–147. (My thanks to Dr. Debbie Weissman for this reference.) For Kaplan's attitude toward women in Jewish tradition, see Mordecai Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew* (New York, 1948), chap. 20, along with Carole Kessner's analysis in *Reconstructionist* 47, no. 5 (July–August 1981): 38–44. Also cf. the beginning of n. 4 above.

14. Even so, there was opposition to the first Reform woman rabbi in Germany in the 1930s; see the article about Rabbi Jonas cited at the end of n. 6 above.

15. *Jewish Forum* 5, no. 9, p. 380.

16. See *CCAR Journal*, vol. 32, pp. 161–162, 171–172; *American Reform Responsa*, pp. 30, 38.

17. In *PRA* 2 (1928): 168, in his report on Jewish life in Warsaw, he prophetically predicts the tensions that will arise between yeshiva students and their prospective wives who have studied in public schools. In *PRA* 3 (1929): 41, he briefly attacks the one-sided get, the institution of halitzah, and the plight of the agunah, though without offering any concrete solutions. In his *The Jewish Way of Life* (New York, 1946), pp. 106–108 and 125–126 (2nd ed., New York, 1957, pp. 48–51 and 67–69), Aronson quotes a number of talmudic passages about marriage and a number of modern passages which state that the Jewish character of the home rests upon the Jewish woman. However, I would not try to read too much meaning into those passages because the entire book is mostly a collection of quotations.

18. Cf. below, n. 24.

19. Rabbi David Aronson to the Committee on Jewish Law, March 24, 1933, in Boaz Cohen Archives, Archive no. 24, Rare Book Room, Library, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Box 5, "Holidays from R. Aronson, David" file.

20. *Bulletin of the Rabbinical Assembly*, December 1949, p. 11. This was an inhouse bulletin which appeared from 1937 until the 1950s. It is extremely rare; I consulted the copy at the Rabbinical Assembly offices in New York.

21. Berakhot 20b and *Shulhan Arukh*, Orah Hayyim 271:2.

22. For recent lenient rulings on this subject, see Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz, *Conservative Judaism* 39, no. 1 (Fall 1986): 22, and Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, *Jewish Women in Time and Torah* (Hoboken, N.J., 1990), pp. 92–100.

23. For the history of Jewish women's prayer groups, see Anne Lapidus Lerner, *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 77, pp. 7–6 and 14; Sylvia Barack Fishman, *ibid.*, vol. 69, pp. 46–48; *idem*, *Breath of Life*, pp. 156 ff. (all cited in n. 1 above) and Avraham Weiss, *Women at Prayer: A Halakhic Analysis of Women's Prayer Groups* (Hoboken, N.J., 1990), pp. xv–xvi.

24. Regarding aliyot, see note 5 above. Regarding later innovations, see Rabbi Aaron Blumenthal, *Conservative Judaism* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 24–40; Rabinowitz, *op. cit.* (n. 22 above): 7–33; and David Golinkin, *An Index of Conservative Responsa and Practical Halakhic Studies, 1917–1990* (New York, 1992), pp. 71–78.

25. *PRA* 15 (1951): 120–140 and cf. the discussion *ibid.*, pp. 140–145. This was not the first time Aronson stressed the need to alleviate the plight of the agunah; see his letter quoted above as well as his remarks in *PRA* 7 (1940): 301–311 and 13 (1949): 138.

26. See *PRA* 16 (1952): 49–52. Regarding the many solutions for the agunah problem proposed by Conservative rabbis, see Sidney Schwarz, "Conservative Judaism and the Agunah," *Conservative Judaism* 36, no. 1 (Fall 1982): 37–44 and my Index (n. 24 above): 38–40.

27. Based on a letter from Rabbi Kassel Abelson dated March 13, 1995. For further important details, see "Beth El Synagogue" in DAP, Box 5, Folder 3, which summa-

rizes a meeting in April 1975 at which Aronson and Abelson outlined the history of women's rights at Beth El.

28. A history of the case along with all of the responsa and letters received was published in *Conservative Judaism* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1956).

29. Regarding Aronson's involvement in that case and in a similar case, see his recollections in *PRA* 49 (1967): 188–189.

30. *Conservative Judaism* 11, no. 1, p. 50. For a thorough refutation of the Orthodox position on the mehitzah, see my "Responsum Regarding the Mehitzah in the Synagogue," in *Responsa of the Va'ad Halakhah of the Rabbinical Assembly of Israel* 2 (5747): 5–20 (in Heb.) and the English summary, *ibid.*, pp. i–ii.

31. *Conservative Judaism* 11, no. 1, pp. 61–63. For the original typescript of the article, see DAP, Box 5, Folder 1.

32. See n. 27 above.

33. The resolutions of the 1973 convention were not published in *PRA*. Aronson mentions the resolution in his article in *Women's League Outlook* 44, no. 2 (Winter 1973): 7, 28. My thanks to Mrs. Bertha Aronson, who sent me a copy of the article.

34. Rabbi Aaron Blumenthal in *Conservative Judaism* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 29–30 and Rabbi Seymour Siegel in a letter to members of the Rabbinical Assembly dated July 18, 1978. Also see the undated "Resolution on Women's Rights" (DAP, Box 5, Folder 3) from one of the Women's League conventions, which refers to Aronson's *Outlook* article in a footnote.

35. *Jewish Spectator* 44, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 33–36.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

37. *Ibid.* For two important documents from 1977, see an untitled letter from Aronson and a letter from Aronson addressed to "Dear Colleague" dated April 18, 1977 (both in DAP, Box 5, Folder 3) in which he and Rabbi Jack Segal suggest that women rabbis study at the Seminary but be ordained by a Bet Din of three members of the Rabbinical Assembly.

38. For a history of that process, see Robert Gordis, *Judaism* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1964): 6–12, as well as Arnon Bruckstein, "Ordaining Women as Rabbis and Cantors in the Conservative Movement" (M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1990) (in Heb.).

39. Gordis, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–20.

40. This is the "Lieberman clause" which is added to the ketubah for the purpose of using the secular courts to force a recalcitrant husband to give a get. See *PRA* 17 (1953): 75–79 and 17 (1954): 64–68.

41. Gordis, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

42. This is a paraphrase of Avot 3:18, which Aronson quoted earlier on.

43. Gordis, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–20. For four documents from 1983–85, see DAP, Box 5, folder 3: "Woman Rabbi – 4 Votes Short," *Heritage*, Friday, April 29, 1983, p. 5; "Aronson on Women as Rabbis," *Direction*, November–December 1983, pp. 4 and 10; a letter from Aronson to the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards dated December 15, 1983 in which he briefly explains why women rabbis may decide questions of Jewish law, serve on a Bet Din, lead the congregation in prayer, serve as witnesses and so on; and Rabbi Arthur Oleisky writing in the *Anshei Israel Herald*

(Tucson, Arizona) in April–May 1985 in which he says that Aronson recited the Shehehayanu blessing after the Rabbinical Assembly voted to admit the first two women into its ranks.

The second and fourth articles state that Aronson had advocated the ordination of women as rabbis since the 1920s. I have, as yet, found no written proof of this assertion, but there is one hint that points in that direction. In DAP, Box 5, Folder 3, there is a newspaper clipping from the Minneapolis Star dated Saturday June 5, 1943 (or: 1948) and entitled "Most State Church Leaders Oppose Women in Pulpits." The fact that Aronson cut out the article and saved it until his death may indicate that he was interested in women's ordination as early as the 1940s.

44. See *PRA*, vol. 49, pp. 179–191.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 191

46. Though he was apparently already an advocate; see above, nn. 37 and 43.

47. Shabbat 152a.