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## NOAH

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THIS MONTH'S LEHRHAUS OVER SHABBOS IS SPONSORED  
BY **BRENDA AND ELIHU TURKEL**  
IN LOVING MEMORY OF **MRS. LIVIA TURKEL**,  
WHO DEDICATED HER LIFE TO JEWISH PRAYER AND LEARNING,  
WHO WAS PROUD TO BELONG TO THE AM HA-SEFER AND WHO  
INCULCATED TORAH VALUES IN HER CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN,  
AND GREAT GRANDCHILDREN.

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### A BIBLICAL DEFENSE OF CITIES

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Throughout the biblical narrative, few vocations are held in as high esteem as that of sheep herding. No less than Moses, Jacob, and David claim the illustrious title of shepherd. In contrast to the shepherds' exalted characters, the farmer, hunter, and city builder count in their ranks the biblical characters Cain, Esau, and Ishmael. Cities and their founders seem particularly looked down upon in the Bible. Rather than Adam, Noah, or Abraham, it is the first murderer, Cain, who becomes the founder of the first city (Genesis 4:17). Yet, it is not just the founders of cities who seem consigned to suffer the Bible's ire and condemnation. Not only is Paradise in the Bible a garden, not a city, but even when cities (Sodom and Gomorrah) are "like the Garden of the Lord" (Genesis 13:10) they are destroyed for their immorality. It would appear that for the Bible, Paradise can only be found in a rural setting, outside of the city. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that none of the forefathers chose to live in cities, and instead were tent dwellers. As Dr. Leon Kass writes in his book *The Beginning of Wisdom*, "the city [for the Bible] is rooted in fear, greed, pride, violence, and the desire for domination" (p. 147). Kass's claim, and many others like it, draw from one story in the Bible more than others—the story of the Tower of Babel.

Towards the beginning of Genesis, the reader is told of a unified world, filled with cosmopolitan inhabitants who seek to build a city, construct a fortified tower, and "make a name" for themselves (Genesis 11:4). In response, God thwarts their plans and expresses disappointment at their behavior. God then "scatter[s] them from there over the face of the whole earth," and as a result "they [stop] building the city" (Genesis 11:8). This story is often used as a cautionary tale of the city's dangers. Opponents of urban life frequently argue that the Bible is making the implicit claim that the city necessarily aims to glorify man. For them, all cities are like Babel, challenging the power of God and seeking self-sufficiency. Instead, they argue, God can be found in a quiet pastoral life, far from the vicissitudes of the city.

Yet, this is only one way to read the narrative of the Tower of Babel. As God conveys his anger at the inhabitants of Babel, the Bible leaves the reader uncertain as to what provokes God's anger. The reader is only told that God is concerned that if they continue along this path "nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach" (Genesis 11:6). Perhaps it is not the construction of a city per se that draws God's ire, but rather what the people intend to do with the city. Perhaps the Bible is not trying to encourage the reader to reject urban life, but rather attempting to teach the value of cities when they are properly constructed, and their dangers when they are misused. This reading comes into clearer relief when we consider the origins of another famous biblical city, Jerusalem.

The origins of Jerusalem and the Tower of Babel are parallel in many ways. Both arise when there is unity, either in the land or the world at large. The Tower is built as the world begins to gather from scattered settlements and becomes unified around a central city (Genesis 11:1-2). David builds Jerusalem as he unites his kingdom and attempts to unify his nation around a central city (2 Samuel 5). Both Jerusalem and the Tower are built around a central tower or fortress; for Jerusalem, the fortress will later be known as the City of David (2 Samuel 5:7), and for Babel, the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4,9). Furthermore, just as the people of Babel build the Tower to make a name for themselves, the fortress David captures is named "the City of David," advancing David's name in Israel (Genesis 11:4; 2 Samuel 5:9).

Yet, the story of Jerusalem diverges from that of the Tower of Babel. In the subsequent chapters after the capture of the fort at Jerusalem, one would expect David to consolidate power around his capital. Yet, his primary preoccupation appears to be ensuring that Jerusalem is the earthly dwelling place of God. First, David brings the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). As he does so, he "dance[s] before the Lord with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14), in a demonstration that even as he is a king over Israel, he is first and foremost a servant of God. Immediately following this event, David seeks to build the Temple in his new capital, a dream his son Solomon will bring to fruition (2 Samuel 7, 1 Kings 5-8). Perhaps most

strikingly, although David does not build the Temple, archaeological evidence shows that when David builds his own palace, he builds it lower down on the mountain, leaving space for the future Temple to crown the city. This public display of deference to God in the capital city of a burgeoning nation is not an error, but a deliberate action on David's part.

David recognized, as did Aristotle, that the city is a place where human virtue and excellence are uniquely poised to flourish. He also recognized the opportunity that urban life provides to glorify God in the world. Precisely the pretense of self-sufficiency that the city allows, forms the space for man to realize that he is reliant on God for more than just bread and water. City dwellers may not depend on God to send rain in the proper time, but they do rely on God to help protect them from their enemies and to help culture, art, finances, and education blossom. These realms, which supplant mere survival and necessity with human flourishing, are areas where it is often difficult to acknowledge God's presence in human affairs. Yet, when a city's inhabitants do manage to recognize the link between the prosperity of the city and God, they are declaring to the world that God's power spans from the minute to the great, from the farm to the metropolis.

This highlights another strength, as well as a potential weakness of the city. A city that grows in fame and renown and yet manages to acknowledge that its glory belongs to God, exalts God more profoundly, and certainly more publicly, than a village. Similarly, a rich and powerful city denying God makes a more impactful statement than a rural village doing so. Cities, with all their stature in human life, serve as megaphones that can either amplify the word of God or, on the other extreme, intensify the basest human desires of greed, pride, and corruption.

David's choice to make the capture and inauguration of Jerusalem about God, rather than himself, begins the process of constructing a city that recognizes its reliance on God in the midst of its success. This process is continued with the reign of Solomon, the golden age of ancient Israel, that sees the arrival of dignitaries from around the world and the construction of the magnificent Temple (2 Kings 5-10). The Temple is the epicenter of the city, much like the Tower of Babel. The Temple too, through the medium of sacrifices and prayer, is a "tower that reaches to heaven" (Genesis 11:4). Yet, unlike the Tower, the Temple attempts to glorify God in the world. By inviting dignitaries and royalty to Jerusalem, Solomon weds political power and religious aspiration, ensuring that the city of Jerusalem exists not simply to make a name for Israel, but to exalt the name of God in the world.

The builders and inhabitants of Jerusalem took the opportunity provided by city life, the prominence and the prosperity it provides, and used it to bring a religious discourse, and indeed monotheism into the world. In this sense, Jerusalem serves as the corrective for the Tower of Babel. Just as the prideful misuse of the city leads to the dispersion of people throughout the earth, the proper city, one dedicated to the service of God, leads to the unity of people on earth. As the prophet Isaiah predicts, Jerusalem will become an international capital of prayer, as people are gathered from all corners of the earth. This unity counteracts the egoistic objectives of the Tower of Babel, demonstrating that the city can recognize and extoll God's primacy and escape the punishment of dispersion throughout the earth. In this reading, the story of Babel is not meant to caution against the building of cities. Cities, aiming at human goods and garnering influence and acclaim, are best fitted to bring God into the world.

Today, all cities, given their finite resources and space, compel us to make conscious, value-driven decisions about the placement of parks, libraries, houses of worship, and other institutions. The challenge of cities being deluded by illusions of self-sufficiency has never been greater than today. This can present an obstacle, but also an opportunity for moral and spiritual aspiration. We must recognize, as David did, that cities are not just places to make us a name, like the Tower of Babel, but, like Jerusalem, places to exalt the name of God.

Instead of grappling with the difficulties of modern life by escaping to small rural communities, we should build cities populated with people who share a devotion to God and a common conception of the good. In these cities, we could instantiate our values in the buildings we construct and the lives we lead. Together, let us aspire for the day we may justly declare, as King David once did, "The Lord is great and much acclaimed in the city of our God... joy of all the earth" (Psalms 48:1).

## WHEN THE BEGGAR KNOCKS

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Three fancy Upper West Side hotels have been converted into [homeless shelters](#), one of which has been designated for men struggling with substance abuse and addiction. The Jews of the Upper West Side have been vocal about this development -- but with conflicting messages. Many have watched the neighborhood change with the influx of these new neighbors. They see a version of life from which they were previously shielded, and they feel afraid for themselves and their children. In turn, they have called on the city to reverse course, closing the new hotel-shelters and relocating hundreds of people. A second group of local residents are presenting a different message. This group is proud of the neighborhood for taking in and sheltering people who are otherwise the most vulnerable to contracting COVID in overcrowded shelters. They proclaim unequivocally that a "stay at home" direction for those without a home can be deadly and are protesting to keep the new hotel-shelters open. While loud voices exist on each of these sides, a third group is watching and quietly struggling with the choice. They feel deeply the obligation to welcome the homeless, a value in which they have always believed. And yet, they feel afraid of the people and behaviors they are seeing in the streets. Their fear is real, even if they are sometimes embarrassed by it. Do they want these new neighbors to stay? They are deeply unsure.

This story has been catching headlines. But it is not unique to this neighborhood or this city. That we allow people in our country to go hungry and unsheltered has been true for years and has become much worse since COVID hit this year. The numbers of hungry and homeless people in this country are staggering. In the abstract, we find this knowledge horrifying and demand to know why our country doesn't take better care of its people, and yet, on the individual neighborhood level, we find our charge to care for people harder to fulfill. This phenomenon has been termed "Nimbyism," an acronym for the phrase "not in my backyard." We want people fed and housed, but not in our own homes and kitchens--not even in the backyard.

This struggle to balance our obligations and our anxiety is happening today, but this struggle is also ancient. The Talmud offers three stories that explore the tensions held by many contemporary Americans. They each ask: What are we meant to do when the beggar comes to our door? How are we meant to respond? What is being asked of us? Although the Talmud contains many laws and stories about people who are hungry or poor asking for food and shelter, the three stories I share here are not about the experience of poverty. They are about the emotional and psychic experience of being personally asked to open our doors and give. Each story is told from the perspective of the giver, and in two of the three stories the beggar is not even a real person. Read together, these stories offer a complex picture of the delicate balance between the feelings of responsibility and fear that surface in the moment when the beggar knocks.

The question of how and where to build shelters for people who are homeless is a question of behavior. To discover the right thing to do -- the right way to behave -- from the perspective of Judaism requires us to explore Jewish law, which tells us how to act. But if we want to better understand the experience of the heart, if we seek deeper insight into personal emotional reactions, that is when we turn to stories.

The first two stories -- each very short -- when read together, offer us the extremes of what we imagine we should do when a beggar knocks at our door. The first story sets the highest possible bar for our behavior. [Shabbat 156b](#) tells the unlikely story of the wedding night of Rabbi Akiva's daughter. It was fated, we are told, that on the night of her wedding she would be bitten by a snake and die. Miraculously, she averts the severe decree by pinning her hairpin through the wall, directly into the eye of the snake. In the morning, Rabbi Akiva finds her alive and questions her about what she could have done to merit this changing of fate. She answers:

["In the evening a poor person came and knocked on the door, and everyone was preoccupied with the feast and nobody heard him. I stood and took the portion that you had given me and gave it to him."](#)

This woman models for us the most extreme possible version of caring for and feeding a poor person. She does not outsource the work of caring for the hungry even on the night of her own wedding. She alone is able to hear the beggar over the din of her own party. She doesn't offer him some leftovers found in the kitchen but her own portion of food designated for the bride herself. She sets an impossibly high standard for selflessness in the face of poverty. Who wouldn't forgive a bride for focusing on her own joy on the night of her wedding? Rabbi Akiva's daughter represents our best selves. The part of us that feels the responsibility to care for the poor must be held above all else, in every moment. Caring for the poor, she teaches us, is not merely important; it is a matter of life and death, not necessarily for the recipient but for the giver. In this story we learn that when the beggar knocks, answering the door could save your life.

[Mo'ed Katan 28a](#), however, teaches exactly the opposite. Rabbi Hiyya, we learn, was so righteous that the angel of death could never take him because he was always involved in his study. So the Angel of Death disguises himself as a poor man and comes to knock at the gate. When others in the household bring food out to him, he calls past them to Rabbi Hiyya: "Don't you, Sir, treat the poor kindly?" Having been called out so directly, Rabbi Hiyya stops his study and answers the door. Seizing his opportunity, Death swoops in for the

kill: "showing him a fiery rod, he made him yield his soul." For Rabbi Hiyya, answering the door was also a matter of life and death. This story embodies our worst fears. Why do we cross the street when a beggar approaches? Why don't we open the door to every hungry person? What do we fear? The image is not subtle: we are afraid of death. In its worst and most extreme form, we are afraid that if we open the door, death will grab us. (In this moment of COVID spread and "contactless delivery," we know this fear of death lurking at our doorway all too well.) This strange image of the Angel of Death dressed as a beggar may feel problematic, but it also helps articulate a feeling many people experience. When we see a person suffering and hungry, we are reminded of the fragility of our own lives. We imagine that if we stay far away from the poor and remain shut safely in our homes, we will avoid death. The tactic seems to work for Rabbi Hiyya, until it doesn't.

These two stories paint the extremes: the woman who always gives, and it saves her life; the man who gives once, and it kills him. A third story, found in [Kiddushin 81b-82a](#), paints a much more nuanced and complicated picture. It is one of the more bizarre stories in the Talmud and reads almost like a horror thriller. And, like a horror thriller, it begins in the most peaceful of settings, in the home of a righteous man named Pelimo, on the evening just before Yom Kippur. We can imagine the scene: family gathered together in anticipation, food on the table for the pre-fast meal, Pelimo in his freshly cleaned white robes. After a month of *teshuvah* (repentance), Pelimo likely feels his best, cleanest self just before the holiday of atonement.

Pelimo's character is established in the first line of the story with a single fact: each morning Pelimo said aloud "An arrow in Satan's eye!" This man's daily affirmation taunts Satan. He believes himself to be so righteous that even Satan cannot touch him, and so Satan decides to find out. On the evening of Yom Kippur, Satan disguises himself as a poor man and appears at the back door of Pelimo's home. As in the story of Rabbi Hiyya, food is taken out to the beggar, but not by Pelimo himself. And, like the beggar in that story, this supposed beggar is also not satisfied. Having been fed at the doorway, he calls into the house, "On such a day, when everyone is within, shall I be without?" The phrasing of his question emphasizes a key spatial imagery of the story: who is within, and who is pushed out? His request is honored, and he is brought into the home. Perhaps he is given a seat in the kitchen at the back door. Again, he asks to come further inside: "On a day like this, when everyone sits at a table, shall I sit alone?" He requests, maybe demands, to be seated at the family table. The family invites him in. Only when this man is fully inside the home and seated at the table does his body begin to change. Suddenly they notice that his skin is covered in sores. Pelimo admonishes him to "sit properly." In response, the man asks for a glass of liquor but, instead of drinking from it, he spits phlegm into it. The scene is written to trigger the gag reflex. This man -- not really a man, but Satan in disguise -- is the personification of disgust. When the family scolds him for his behavior, he keels over and dies right there at the table. As in the story of Rabbi Hiyya, they have opened the door to the beggar and let in illness, disgust, and death. The scene plays out as our worst nightmare of what might happen if we choose to open the doors of our cozy, safe homes to welcome a person in need.

But the story doesn't end there. In fact, it gets worse. Pelimo is blamed for the man's death, or, at least, he fears he will be. He

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<sup>1</sup> Satan in rabbinic texts usually appears to test characters, ultimately pushing them to be better people.

begins to hear shouting: "Pelimo has killed a man! Pelimo has killed a man!" As readers, we don't know if these voices are real or only inside his head, but, regardless, Pelimo decides to run away. Flipping the spatial imagery, the beggar has made his way into the center of the home and Pelimo is forced out. He runs to the edge of town and hides in the public restroom. Having left the pre-Yom Kippur cleanliness of his home, he finds himself in the dirtiest of spaces; ancient public restrooms were likely even more disgusting than their modern counterparts.

Now we move into full zombie movie territory, as Satan, posing as the dead poor man, rises and chases Pelimo into the far reaches of the public bathroom. Pelimo is overcome with fear and falls, prostrating before Satan. Again reversing spatial expectations, instead of prostrating before God in *shul*, as Pelimo intended, he finds himself in the most unholy place, prostrating before Satan. Seeing Pelimo's extreme suffering, Satan takes pity and reveals his true identity. In this final moment of the story, Satan models mercy and then vulnerability, asking Pelimo, "why have you been provoking me?" Instead, he asserts, "You should say: '[May] The Merciful [a name for God] rebuke Satan.'"

Read as a whole, the story doesn't paint Pelimo in a positive light. This is the story of a man who believes himself to be more righteous than he is. His desire to be so good that he cannot be touched by Satan is actually deeply self-centered. His focus on being good is a personal goal that is seemingly entirely disconnected from the needs of others. Unlike Rabbi Akiva's daughter, who is able to hear and care for the poor even at her own wedding, Pelimo cannot prioritize the poor even on the eve of the Day of Atonement. From this story, we learn that if we are bowing to God in *shul* on Yom Kippur while thinking more about ourselves than the poor man sleeping in the street outside, we might as well be bowing to Satan in the public restroom.

And yet we can all see ourselves in Pelimo. Why does Satan choose to dress as a beggar? What makes this such a hard test? This story -- although excessive in every way -- validates fear of the poor as an ancient and human struggle. Pelimo knows the right thing to do: he should feed the beggar and welcome him into his home. But the knowledge of right and wrong is not always enough to quiet our fears and even, sometimes, our physical response of disgust. The story of Pelimo allows us to hold both realities: the knowledge that his behavior is wrong and also that his behavior is driven by a human response that we may share.

Many of us face this challenge. We want to be good people, to do the right thing, and we know what that should look like. When asked in the abstract if we should welcome people who have no other homes into empty local hotels, the answer could not be more simple: Yes! As humans and as Jews, we must do everything we can to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and provide shelter and safety to those in need. But many local residents are struggling to find their way to this yes. They step out of their front doors and encounter a person defecating on the sidewalk. They walk past someone holding a needle, with a bruised arm. They are approached directly and asked for money by someone not wearing a mask. And they respond viscerally, the way that Pelimo and his family responded. Like Pelimo, they question why they have opened their home --the Upper West Side *feels* like their home, whether or not it truly belongs to them -- to potential disease and disgrace. We want the hungry to be fed but don't really want to share the same table.

Let me be clear: this is not an Upper West Side problem. I am writing now about this particular location because it is so close to my home, and because the Upper West Side is home to my Yeshiva, the place where I work and teach. But this same situation is occurring in cities throughout the country. As a nation, we are raised to fear "the homeless." We have never really been taught to open our own personal doors.

In my home growing up, every year when we would gather for the Passover Seder, my mother would announce that she had made a donation to a food bank in honor of each guest. She explained annually that she began this practice "since we cannot open our doors directly to the poor." I always imagined this to be a very wonderful example of caring for the world outside. I never once questioned the assumption -- and the lesson I was learning -- that "we cannot open our doors directly." Why not? Why couldn't we invite someone hungry to come and eat at our table with us? This may also have been the routine in Pelimo's home, and that of Rabbi Hiyya too. They did feel a responsibility to feed the poor, but they outsourced the interaction to someone else. In their case, it's a family servant; in our case, it was the food bank.

I find these stories helpful and challenging as I navigate my own dual response when I am approached directly and asked for food or money by someone who makes me feel scared. I think of these stories every time I walk past fellow New Yorkers sleeping in the street, even on bitter cold nights. These stories help me navigate the world as it is. But this is not the world as it should be and not the world as it must be. There is a danger in reading these stories with static categories of have and have-not. The world is not divided into givers and beggars. I believe that our responsibility goes far beyond even the image of Rabbi Akiva's daughter. Justice is not a question of the wealthy sharing with the poor; justice is when we no longer have a category of poor. We will have justice only when nobody needs to sleep in the street. As can be found elsewhere in Jewish texts, most notably in [Rambam's often-taught hierarchy of tzedakah](#) (could be translated as charity, or more literally as justice), our real mandate is not about opening temporary shelters; it is about finding homes and ongoing safety for all people. In order to begin to pursue real justice, we must start by asking what systems are at play -- systems that discriminate against certain races, genders, sexualities, states of mental health -- that have resulted in some having homes and others depending on shelters. And then we will need to be brave and relentless enough to dismantle and change those systems.

Aggadah is a gift. These stories are a rich starting place to help us dig deeper into understanding our hearts and minds. Yet, we cannot live only in stories. At some point, we must turn to action. There are real people seeking shelter and food in our city and in our country. They are not the bogeyman image of the "poor" we find in these Talmudic tales. They are not death-in-disguise, and they have not entered our lives to provide us with the opportunity to do *mitzvot* so that we may subvert our own severe decree. Their needs don't exist in order to test or teach us. They have lives and stories. Each of their lives is unique and infinitely valuable. And yet, their presence *is* a test. How we behave in the world *is* a measure of our righteousness. Like Pelimo, we have each been given an opportunity to rise to the moment.

## LIKE DEBORAH AND ESTHER OF OLD: AMERICAN JEWISH WOMEN AND THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

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In this centennial year of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote, there has been a refreshing focus on complicating the story of the suffrage movement. For one thing, no one gave women anything. Women struggled over many decades and several generations to win this basic right of citizenship. Without it they were forced to rely on men voting in favor of women voting, since they could not vote on their own behalf.

For another thing, there were deep fissures within the suffrage movement that reflected a divided American society. A majority of American suffragists probably were white, middle-class, Protestant women, but very significant numbers of African American, Latina, working-class, Catholic, Mormon, and Jewish women, among others, also worked for enfranchisement and influenced the movement in ways large and small. While there were arguments in favor of suffrage that these diverse groups of women all drew upon, their differences also led them to approach their activism along divergent paths. Middle-class women were more likely to highlight the importance of their roles as mothers who should have a formal role in public affairs as part of their family and community responsibilities, while working-class women were more likely to focus on the necessity of gaining the vote as a means of improving working conditions and perhaps remaking social, political, and economic structures.

Some white suffragists drew on racism and xenophobia to emphasize the benefit of white women's votes counterbalancing those of black and immigrant men. And Jewish women, while generally accepted as white by the early twentieth century heyday of the suffrage movement, found that antisemitism could be as much a problem among activists as among reactionaries. This essay, then, begins to tell the tale of the too-long forgotten participation of American Jewish women's participation in the suffrage movement.

The question of suffrage was widely debated within the American Jewish community. As the *American Hebrew*, a periodical aimed primarily at acculturated American Jews, editorialized in 1914, "Whether we are suffragist or anti, or are occupying that most uncomfortable place, a seat on the fence, we find ourselves sooner or later discussing suffrage. It has crept into our favorite magazines, our heart-to-heart talks, and the family table conversation. Suffrage is in the air."<sup>2</sup> Jewish periodicals in English, Yiddish, Hebrew, and German, representing every point of view from socialism to anarchism to Zionism to middle-class domesticity, ran symposia on suffrage. *Der Fraynd (The Friend)*, the socialist Workmen's Circle monthly publication, supported women's right to vote alongside their right to work and unionize. *Di Froyen Velt*, a magazine for more religiously and politically conservative American Jewish women—which loosely

translated its own title as the *Jewish Ladies Home Journal*—ran a column called "From the Women's World" which covered suffrage activism around the world, though it disavowed any sign of the kind of militancy that characterized the British suffrage movement.

Across religious denominations, the American Jewish community was generally supportive of women gaining the right to vote. In the statewide suffrage referenda held in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts in 1915—all of which failed, though a second attempt in New York in 1917 succeeded—the Jewish districts voted more heavily in favor of enfranchising women than any others. A long line of prominent Jewish women—including Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, first president of the National Council of Jewish Women (founded 1893), and Maud Nathan, longtime president of the National Consumers League (founded 1899)—became very visible proponents of suffrage, as did numerous rabbis, including the well-known Reform rabbi Stephen S. Wise and Orthodox rabbi Jacob Levinson. In many American synagogues, the first woman ever to address the congregation from the pulpit was a Jewish suffragist invited to do so by the rabbi.

It would be disingenuous to pretend that all American Jews supported suffrage. There certainly were Jewish anti-suffragists. The symposia in American Jewish periodicals dutifully invited them to voice their objections, which were almost never Jewish in nature. Ironically, the most prominent anti-suffragist was Maud Nathan's sister, Annie Nathan Meyer. It remains something of a mystery as to why Meyer, a founder of Barnard College, opposed suffrage. The lifelong personal animosity between the sisters may have been a primary factor. In any event, they made something of a spectacle of themselves by debating each other in public and writing dueling letters to editors. In general, though, there were probably more American Jews who just did not care much about suffrage than those who actively worked against it.

This apathy was one obstacle faced by Jewish suffragists, but they also had to confront the ongoing challenge of antisemitism. Racism was the more blatant prejudice within the movement, but there were notable moments of antisemitism as well. In 1895, the eminent suffrage pioneer Elizabeth Cady Stanton presided over the publication of *The Woman's Bible*, a radical text that blamed organized religion and particularly Judaism for the patriarchy and misogyny that shadowed women's lives. Mainstream suffragists roundly condemned the book, the reason being its anti-religious stance, not its antisemitism. A delegation from the recently founded National Council of Jewish Women visited Stanton to protest, but to no avail. And in 1915, after the New York state referendum failed, a number of suffrage leaders blamed immigrants and especially Jews for the disappointment, despite the demonstrable fact that, as Henry Street Settlement founder Lillian Wald pointed out, the highest levels of support had come from the most heavily Jewish areas. These episodes did not squash many Jewish women's enthusiasm, but they did dampen the willingness of Jewish women's groups like the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, and Hadassah to formally endorse suffrage, despite the fact that the (probably vast) majority of their members believed women should vote.

Jewish women participated in the suffrage movement in a variety of ways all over the United States. Sections from the National Council of Jewish Women held events to promote suffrage in their communities from the earliest days of the organization and invited leading suffragists to address the organization's triennial conventions. The mother and daughter pair of Hannah Marks Solomons and Selina

<sup>2</sup> "Of Interest to Women: "Little Corporal" of Woman Suffrage Party An Immigrant Jewess Miss Martha Klatschken Sees in Ballot Great Power." *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* (1903-1922), Jun 19, 1914. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/884063188/32B1DDCF37EA41D8PQ/1>.

Solomons played a key role in the California suffrage movement, and Selina was central to an effort to organize working-class women ahead of the successful statewide suffrage campaign in 1911. Belle Fligelman became involved in the movement while attending the University of Wisconsin. She returned home to Helena, Montana to become a suffrage stump speaker even though her stepmother threw her out of the house for doing so.

Key Jewish labor leaders like Rose Schneiderman and Pauline Newman in New York emphasized the importance of gaining the right to vote among working-class and immigrant women whose primary concerns were often bread-and-butter economic issues. Agreeing with them, Philadelphia shop girl Olga Gross made cheap peanut brittle and sold it on street corners during her brief lunch breaks to raise money for the movement. Gertrude Weil, a Smith College graduate and founder of the North Carolina Association of Jewish Women, became president of her local suffrage league and also chief lieutenant to National American Woman Suffrage Association leader Carrie Chapman Catt in North Carolina. Miriam Allen DeFord and Rebecca Hourwich Reyher both gave countless street-corner speeches for suffrage in Massachusetts during the 1915 referendum campaign. Caroline Katzenstein took Alice Paul to her first street meeting in Philadelphia and ultimately joined her in the National Woman's Party, the more militant wing of the American suffrage movement, in which Paul also worked closely with Anita Pollitzer of South Carolina and Felice Cohn of Nevada. Reyher, Pollitzer, and Cohn all remained involved with the National Woman's Party and supported the push for an Equal Rights Amendment after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified.

Activists like these did not speak only to Jewish audiences. Maud Nathan, for example, held office in local and national suffrage organizations and also served as a translator at several International Woman Suffrage Alliance conferences abroad. But when Nathan and Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, Gertrude Weil, and other Jewish suffragists did address Jewish audiences, they called on Jewish themes as additional justification for enfranchising women. In a 1915 *American Hebrew* symposium on suffrage, renowned communal activist Rebekah Kohut—one of the most Jewishly educated women of her generation—pointed out, “The Fifth Commandment not only says, ‘Honor thy father and thy mother,’ but the Bible tells us, ‘Thou shalt fear thy mother and thy father’ . . . his recognition of both sexes typifies the co-equal position which woman holds with man in the home and family life . . . but if the home was the world of the Jewess . . . today the world has truly become her home.”<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, *American Hebrew* columnist Adele Rabinovitz cited the biblical precedents of the judge Deborah and the queen Esther as Jewish models of women's leadership and divinely sanctioned public and political activity. At a rally in Philadelphia just before the 1915 Pennsylvania referendum, Nathan also invoked history, exhorting a Jewish audience of thousands: “The Jewish people, more than any other, ought to realize the benefits of freedom . . . Let the Jewish men of Pennsylvania be true to their traditions and vote for a square deal on election day.”<sup>4</sup>

Once the Nineteenth Amendment passed, Jewish women well understood that enfranchisement would have implications for both their political and their religious lives. Nearly 50% of the new Socialist Party registrations in New York, most of them Jewish, were women. The National Council of Jewish Women openly rejoiced over the new power and influence its members would have as voters and immediately joined the Women's Joint Congressional Committee, which lobbied Congress on legislative issues. Even former anti-suffragists understood this; one of the first things Annie Nathan Meyer did after enfranchisement was join the League of Women Voters. And, importantly, Jewish women brought their newfound power back into their own religious communities. Immediately after winning the vote, Jewish women across the country successfully demanded representation on their synagogue boards. As Marion Misch, whom Temple Beth-El of Providence elected as a trustee in 1921, explained: “Jewish women are . . . esteemed not only supreme in their households, but as direct agencies for influence upon the affairs of the time.”<sup>5</sup>

Jewish women in the suffrage movement have remained mostly invisible for too long. While the American Jewish community—unsurprisingly—did not unanimously advocate women's enfranchisement, it did overwhelmingly support the cause, especially during the final years leading up to the 1920 ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. A combination of a historical blindness to the diversity of suffrage supporters, some antisemitism within the movement itself, and a broader silencing of women's voices has all contributed to Jewish suffragists' invisibility, as has many historians' focus on activism within the Jewish community. But American Jewish women were deeply engaged in all the social issues of their day, not on Jewish issues alone, and it does them a disservice not to explore their commitments to all kinds of social and political movements. Their activism was embedded in their Jewish identities but not exclusive to explicitly Jewish interests. This legacy of drawing on Jewish values to make right what is wrong in the world is one we can all honor today.

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<sup>3</sup> “Home and the Vote According to Mrs. Kohut.” *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* (1903-1922), September 10, 1915. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/880903882?accountid=9703>.

<sup>4</sup> “Jews Besiege Theatre to Hear Suffrage Plea,” *Philadelphia Record*, November 1915.

<sup>5</sup> “Woman Suffrage Adopted by Jewish Congregation Here,” *Union Bulletin* (Providence), January 1921.