WALLS AND MEHITZOT: A BIG DIFFERENCE
By Bat Sheva Marcus

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

In Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall,”
the poet complains about the need
for a wall between himself and his neighbor.
Walls, he notes, come in
two kinds. Some are useful, protecting
lands and preserving relationships.
But others are needless, and Frost
notes that nature itself resists these
unwelcome barriers. Over time, the cold and the earth
seek to set things right, creating cracks and holes and
ultimately bringing walls down.

Some of you may be aware of the current controversy
surrounding the wall, or glass ceiling, that limits women
serving in clergy roles. Much to our delight, many of
these walls have been slowly eroding. Cracks and crevices
have materialized, both here in the United States and
in Israel. And wherever an opening appeared, bright,
committed, and learned women have stepped into the
space. Unfortunately, not everyone is happy with the
erosion of these walls. And recently there have been more
and stronger attempts to rebuild the wall, putting up new
stumbling blocks in the path of these women.

This is not a new controversy. For decades, women have
been achieving ever higher levels of learning, religious
commitment, and mastery of rabbinic roles that had long
been the sole purview of men. But for the past fifteen
years, these women have had to step over stones and
contort themselves to fit through the crevices that have
made this possible. They have used never-heard-before
titles—or have used no title at all. They have struggled
to create their own educational programs, to carve out
employment opportunities, and to describe their jobs in
paragraphs when a single word like “rabbi,” “ram” (rash
metiva), or “posek” would have sufficed. But they kept
marching forward, and the walls that kept women out of
Jewish leadership have slowly but surely crumbled.

In Israel and in the United States, these openings,
and the reactions they have inspired, have diverged.
In a recent article in the journal Tradition, Dr. Rachel
Levmore recounts how women became fully integrated
as toanimiyyot rabbaniyyot—rabbinic advocates—in
the highest rabbinical courts. The “serious, professional
work and attitude” of these women, Dr. Levmore writes,
“enabled their appearances in the Beit Din to become part
of the rabbinic landscape.” Women received certification
from the Chief Rabbinate to do this work, and the practice
continued on page 3

WHY MEHITZOT MATTER
By Blu Greenberg

Item: A Modern Orthodox community in Queens,
New York, celebrating an aufruf, holds Shabbat
services in the social hall of the local yeshiva. The
opaque mehitzah separating front from back is hung
ceiling to floor, completely blocking sightlines. The
rabbis, much beloved by his community, delivers his
sermon in a voice inaudible to the women. He must
be aware of this, because when he praises the groom’s
mother, a pillar of the community, he raises his voice
so all can hear. I have the urge to call out, “Heicher,
heicher” (“higher, higher”) using the traditional cry of
hard-of-hearing shul-goers, but as a first-time guest, I
mind my manners. After davening, I hear clusters of
women complain that they could not hear the rabbi—and
that he often does this. I am taken aback. Why did
they not protest, call out?

Item: My flight is delayed and lands in Tel Aviv on a
Friday afternoon, twenty minutes before candle lighting.
I call my children in Ra’anana to say I won’t make it,
leave my luggage at the airport, and check into a hotel
nearby. On Shabbat morning, the concierge directs me to
the closest synagogue, and I make my way up to the ezrat
nashim. The lights are off, the place is dusty, and a few
chairs are overturned. Prayer books open on the ledges
are nabzornim from Yom Kippur—and this is February.
More surprising, a bar mitzvah is taking place below, yet
I am the sole resident of the ezrat nashim. The mother
continued on page 3
the family is an institution most
of us take for granted. We grow
up in families and hope to create our
own. So why has the family become
such an important topic in the Jewish
community today?

According to the Pew Research
Center, “In 2011, 4.2 million adults
were newly married, about the same
number as in 2010 and sharply lower
than the 4.5 million newlyweds in 2008.” The study
found that “barely half of adults (51%) were married in
2011 compared with 72% in 1960.” In other words,
Americans adults (25 and older), if they are marrying at
all, are marrying much later: “Marriage increasingly is
being replaced by cohabitation, single-person households
and other adult living arrangements” (Pew Research
Center, November 20, 2012).

American adults are having fewer children; the fertility
rate is below the replacement level of 2.1 children per
woman. Many couples decide not to have children.
Women who have a biological clock and want to have
children but have not yet found an appropriate partner
are deciding that they cannot wait any longer and may
choose to have a child on their own. The traditional path
of becoming an adult—marriage and then children—is
no longer always followed.

These trends, of course, are not only happening in
America, but are prevalent throughout the Western
industrialized world. And to the extent that Jews have
assimilated the norms and values that underlie these
trends, Jewish communities are likewise changing.
The way these changes are being played out within the Jewish
community is the subject of the important new book,
Love, Marriage, and Jewish Families, edited by Sylvia
Barack Fishman, a preeminent sociologist of American
Jews, who is a professor of contemporary Jewish life
at Brandeis University and co-director of the Hadasah-
Brandeis Institute.

The articles in this edited volume explore the changes
in love, marriage, and the family as currently practiced
and understood among American and Israeli Jews.
Including articles on Israeli Jews in this volume makes
sense simply because the culture of individualization and
personalization is present in both countries, and North
American and Israeli Jews together constitute two
major Jewish population centers, comprising 86 percent
of the world Jewish population.

Some articles in this volume use quantitative
methodologies, but most combine the results of both
methodologies or are qualitative. The qualitative emphasis
reflects the greater importance given to the individual
voice in the social sciences today. As a consequence, the
sample size in most of the studies is smaller than might
be expected, but there is greater depth and understanding
of meaning; a sense of narrative is present. Nearly all the
articles supplement secondary source material with data
from original studies.

The articles reflect the multi-dimensionality of the
subject. Topics range from demographic analyses of
Jewish fertility in Israel and America to an overview of
gays and lesbians in Israel to the changing images of
gender ideals among barefoot groups in Israel to alternative
divorce procedures as solutions to the agunah problem.

Fishman’s introduction provides the historical–
sociological context for changes in the way love and
marriage are understood and expressed in the modern or
postmodern context. In the past, the purpose of marriage
was to raise a family, meaning that the goal was to be
a good spouse and a good parent. Today, in what is called
“individualized marriage,” the focus is on achieving
personal values. This is consistent with the emphasis on
individual satisfaction found in Western industrialized
countries like the United States and Israel. The fact that
90 percent of American Jewish men will be married by
the time they are 45, and American Jewish women when
they are over age 50, is taken as a sign that traditionalism
does indeed endure, even when compared with earlier
times when nearly universal marriage was achieved well
before Jews reached age 30.

The book has four sections: Love, Sexuality, and
Personal Choice; Family Transformations; Marriage
and the Law; and Backlash and Reaction. Each of
these sections contains fascinating articles about the
transformations in the way we understand and practice
gender, sexuality, marriage, and family. Although all the
articles offer fascinating insights, I personally found it
encouraging to note that, contrary to the trends brought
about by the individualization of norms, values, and
behavioral expectations in postmodern societies, Daniel
Partner, a research associate at the Cohen Center for
Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, offers new
“evidence to support the counter-narrative claim that
marriage remains a relevant and highly desirable form of
family formation amid a changing landscape” (p. 33).

Ideas that specifically caught my interest include
Rachel S. Bernstein and Fishman’s reference to the
practice of Judaism in the home as “the third shift” for
Jewish women. This concept is an extension of Arlie
Hochschild’s designation of the housework that awaits
women when they return home from their paid work as
the “second shift.” Sergio Della Pergola attributes fertility
rates in Israel, which are the highest among the Western
industrialized countries, to Israel’s being generally
supportive of family life culture. He attributes this to
the phenomenon that Israeli Jews continue to see having
children as a national duty to replace the Jews lost during
the Holocaust. The article by Tehilla Blumenthal provides
an insightful and informative exploration of issues raised
in the decision-making process by unmarried women to
continued on page 22
become mothers. She captures the need these women feel to become mothers, an action largely supported in pro-natal Israel, but not as positively viewed in America. These are but a few of the fascinating and valuable facts and ideas that I gleaned in this excellent volume. The variety of subjects explored indicate the multiplicity of concerns to be examined and taken into consideration in an analysis of the Jewish family in contemporary times.

As the primary institution for socializing the next generation, families provide the place in which behavioral norms, values, and mores are transmitted and the people youngsters mimic and from whom they learn. In other words, it is through families that Jewish behaviors are most effectively transmitted from generation to generation—and so, yes, it is essential that we understand contemporary trends and their impact on Jewish life. Nothing is more basic to the development and maintenance of Jewish communal life and personal identity than patterns of marriage and childrearing. It is thus difficult to think of a more timely and pertinent topic than that explored in Fishman's excellent book.

**Kabbalat Shabbat: The Grand Unification**
*Illuminations and Commentary* by Debra Band
*Honeybee in the Garden*, 2016, $49.95

**By Roselyn Bell**

Debra Band's new volume of illuminated texts for *Kabbalat Shabbat* and Friday night home rituals is both visually breathtaking and conceptually very ambitious. She has provided multiple commentaries, artistic and literary, for the texts, as well as conceptual approaches to them from historical and scientific perspectives. This is a book designed to encourage *hiddur mitzvah*, the amplification of the beauty of carrying out a *mitzvah* and the deepening of its meaning.

Band expands our understanding of the Friday night liturgy by drawing upon *midrash*, history, and even contemporary astroophysical understandings of the structure of the universe (“Grand Unification Theory”). Prof. Arthur Green, in his introduction, traces the history of *Kabbalat Shabbat*, from its halakhic roots in determining the time of acceptance of the beginning of Sabbath and its mystical roots in sixteenth-century Safed. There, the followers of Rabbi Isaac Luria, building upon an earlier tradition of *merkavah* mysticism, brought the esoteric notion of the *sefirot* to the masses, and introduced the custom of welcoming the Sabbath as a bride and a queen. This feminine imagery then became amplified by the recitation at the dinner table of the verses from *Mishlei* describing the *eishet hayil*, the valiant woman who is both homemaker and heroine, and the glorification of the Shekhinah, the feminine aspect of God and the most accessible of the *sefirot*.

The illuminated pages begin with the preparatory aspects of Shabbat—a prayer for the separation of *hallah* and the poem of Hayyim Nahman Bialik, *Habamah Metrosh Ha’ilanot Nistalkah*—not your usual *erev Shabbat* *siddur* fare. The illustrations are richly symbolic, with explanations of their symbolism offered in the commentary at the back. The modes of illustration incorporate traditional forms of Jewish artistry, such as micrography and papercuts. At other times, the drawings portray scenes from the land of Israel or from nature that are symbolically connected to the text.

The Hebrew script is in a calligraphic hand that Band created and used in her earlier books, and the English script is based on an Italian Renaissance italic font. In contrast, the Ma’ariv liturgy (i.e., not the *Kabbalat Shabbat* or home rituals) is presented in standard Hebrew and English fonts, with a simple border framing all those pages.

This is an aesthetically and interpretively dense book. It may be a bit too rich to take to synagogue for davening *Kabbalat Shabbat*, but it is far more than a coffee table book. It should be invited, like the Sabbath queen, into our homes and Shabbat dinner tables to enliven and deepen our appreciation of Shabbat.

**Faith Without Fear: Unresolved Issues in Modern Orthodoxy**
*Michael J. Harris*
*Valentine Mitchell*, 2016, $36.94

**By Roselyn Bell**

What is Modern Orthodoxy? Michael J. Harris, a rabbi serving the Hampstead Synagogue in London as well as an academic with a Ph.D. in philosophy, teaching in the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge, applies the skill sets of both his disciplines to answering this question. He defines Modern Orthodoxy as “the attempt to combine full commitment to Orthodox Judaism with openness to the modern world.”

He describes it as trying “not to evade modernity but to face it head-on, rejecting whatever Orthodoxy can never accommodate but accepting whatever enriches, enhances and ennobles traditional Jewish life.” Given the issues he highlights in this book—the status of women, the challenge of biblical criticism, scholarship, belief in a messiah, and the concept of the chosen people—he seems to say, “Bring it on!”

Rabbi Harris insists that Modern Orthodoxy is not lacking in authenticity and is no less “from” than haredi Judaism. Both exhibit certain discontinuities from the pre-modern past, and each has chosen to build upon different elements from the tradition. He sees, for