



WOMEN IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY 1994 Recommendations and Findings

Paragraphs that appear in italics indicate "Findings".

A Religious and Marital Identity – We Recommend:

A1 Preparation for Marriage and Family Life

A1.1 The creation of new, and up-dating of existing courses and resources – books, tapes, videos – on preparation for marriage and family life, covering all aspects of personal relationships, to be used in every section of the Jewish educational system both formal and informal. Attractive and accessible programmes for all age groups must provide a clear understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a Jewish marriage.

A1.2 That discussion and guidance on potential problems and difficulties be offered to all couples contemplating marriage, led by qualified professionals, as part of "preparation for marriage".

A1.3 Parenting: The provision of programmes on parenting skills and access to professional guidance for families at times of crisis.

A1.4 Promotion of the services provided by the Jewish Marriage Council by an injection of additional resources and clarification of the organisation's aims and objectives.

A2 Single Parents

A2.1 A cohesive, positive approach by all communal and religious bodies towards single mothers and their children, paying particular attention to their social, financial and emotional needs.

A2.2 That members of congregations actively reach out to and support single mothers experiencing poverty and alienation from the rest of the community, and recognise their deep feelings of frustration on behalf of their children.

A3 Adoption of Non-Jewish Children

A3.1 A review of present procedures relating to adoption by Orthodox Batei Din, with a view to providing greater access to information, clearer guidelines and more sensitive support from the relevant religious authorities throughout the adoption process.

A4 Intermarriage

A4.1 That, in an attempt to combat the ever increasing incidence of intermarriage, overall plans for young members of the community should include an educational programme in Israel which will enhance pride in Jewish identity, culture, history and community.

A4.2 That counselling services be made available to individuals and families affected by intermarriage.

A5 Conversion

A5.1 The introduction of common standards for conversion worldwide.

A5.2 The establishment of a bureau for information and counselling for prospective converts to Orthodox Judaism, under the auspices of the Chief Rabbi's office, staffed by professionals and trained volunteers.

A5.3 That uniformity of procedures and conditions be introduced in respect of conversion of a non-Jewish adopted child applicable and acceptable in every Jewish community around the world including Israel.

A5.4 That women converting to Judaism be offered all possible assistance and support together with the finest educational opportunities.

A5.5 That wherever possible each prospective convert be guided and supported by a "mentor" within the setting of all synagogues.

A5.6 That there should always be a strong liaison between the convert's tutor and the Rabbi of the community with which she is associated.

A6 Singles

A6.1 The promotion of a nationwide independent, self-financing, data-based introduction agency, offering an affordable and professional service to all Jewish singles.

A6.2 That all religious and communal bodies actively welcome singles whether young, widowed or divorced – by the creation of an atmosphere of inclusivism – encouraging them to integrate into and participate more fully in the life of the community by ensuring their involvement in religious and communal affairs at all levels.

A6.3 A clear community policy decision be taken to improve and increase the provision of community centres with appropriate social facilities for the unattached of all age groups.

A6.4 That community organisations offer special rates to single women who may need financial assistance to maintain their Jewish identity.

A6.5 Encouragement and assistance be offered to single women wishing to create self-help groups.

B Religious Practice in Traditional Orthodoxy – We Recommend:

B1 Provision of alternative forms of service for women and men

Alternative forms of service are wanted by many women on Shabbat and Festival mornings: alternative minyanim; explanatory services; briefer services followed by learning opportunities.

B2 Bat Mitzvah/Bat Chayil

There is a need for enhanced and up-graded ceremonies, and positive acknowledgement of a Bat Mitzvah celebrant, agreed by the Chief Rabbi and acceptable to all Rabbis, to ensure that all girls have the same opportunities and achieve a real sense of belonging.

B2.1 That guidelines on various alternative services and ceremonies be published for the use of synagogues and parents.

B3 Succot

B3.1 That guidance be given to all synagogues on the participation of women in the mitzvah of Arba Minim.

B4 Simchat Torah

B4.1 That guidance be given on women's participation.

B5 Special Ceremonies

B5.1 The introduction of special ceremonies to enable women to participate – on their own behalf – to mark outstanding achievements, such ceremonies to be held at the end of the Shabbat morning service or at other appropriate times.

B6 Women and Prayer

- B6.1** The publication of special prayers –
- a) Following childbirth
 - b) For the loss of a baby: There is need for special prayers in all appropriate services, e.g. Yizkor, for the loss of a baby through miscarriage and stillbirth.
 - c) For the loss of a young child, particularly under the age of one month when there is no Shiva.
 - d) A ceremony for the naming of a baby daughter in which the mother can participate.

B7 Mourning

B7.1 Guidelines on women's participation in religious observance, such as the saying of Kaddish. Where this is not possible, special emphasis should be paid to the need for women suffering bereavement to have available other and equivalent modes of religious expression.

B8 Bereavement

B8.1 Funerals: The publication of guidelines and communal education on the issue of women's attendance at funerals.

B8.2 Shiva: That Rabbis and lay leaders be more sensitive to the needs and feelings of women mourners and comforters at a Shiva. Clear guidelines for women mourners are required

to create uniformity of procedures in a house of mourning and provision for women who wish to pray.

B8.3 Yahrzeit: That guidance be given on religious options open to women besides the lighting of a Yahrzeit candle.

B9 Education on Women's Obligations

In the absence of men, or in the presence of men who are not members of their household, or who may not wish or be able to perform the mitzvah, women's obligations require clarification regarding Kiddush, Zimmun, Havdalah, Bensching Gomel, Birchat Habanim and Hamotzei.

B9.1 That there be written guidelines for all situations involving women in ritual and prayer, including key events in the life cycle. These guidelines to be supported by public dissemination of the information by Rabbis and teachers.

B9.2 That special effort be made to educate women concerning head covering and modest dress when attending synagogue services and wedding ceremonies.

B10 Mikveh

B10.1 Early and sensitive education of girls and boys regarding the use of mikveh and Taharat Ha'Mishpachah. Women should receive support and encouragement particularly when this mitzvah has not been inherited from their mothers.

B10.2 Attendants: That attendants be trained to deal tactfully and sensitively with all women, especially those who are unsure of the procedures.

B10.3 Location: That mikvaot be located in well lit, convenient and safe areas, but not in too close proximity to a synagogue.

B10.4 Consultation: That women be involved in the consultation process as to the desirability of investing in a new mikveh as opposed to the refurbishment of an existing one.

C Synagogues – Membership, Management, Seating and Access We Recommend:

C1 Synagogue Membership and Procedures

The United Synagogue is currently addressing the issue of women in management within its constituent synagogues. However, in the Regions each Orthodox Synagogue operates under its own rules. There are also widespread variations and inconsistencies in regard to women's rights to membership and election to Councils which cause much concern and dissatisfaction.

C1.1 Synagogue Membership: That women be made aware of all procedures in order to become full voting members of their synagogues, and that guidelines should be issued to empower women, whether married or single, to be accorded full membership of all central Orthodox synagogues, in their own right.

C1.2 Membership Fees: That people under 25, senior citizens and single women be offered preferential rates.

C1.3 Junior Membership: The expansion of Junior membership schemes following Bar/Bat Mitzvah, through a nominal fee, to actively involve young people in the life of the synagogue.

C1.4 That women should be accorded equal opportunities to serve in all areas of synagogue management, wherever Halachah permits.

C1.5 That certain members of the synagogue be nominated to identify newcomers and offer every assistance, to make them feel comfortable and welcome in the synagogue.

C2 Seating

The seating arrangement most favoured by women who wish to move away from the gallery setting is that of men and women sitting on the same level, separated by a mechitzah running down the length of the synagogue.

C2.1 That when women are unable to climb stairs, provision should be made for seating downstairs, where they can see and hear satisfactorily. The disabled and elderly should be made to feel included in the service and comfortable and wanted in the synagogue at all times.

C3 Mechitzah

There is a need for clear definition of the term and clarification of its purpose.

C3.1 That a mechitzah should permit women to see and hear the service in comfort.

C4 Architecture and Design

C4.1 That women be included amongst those responsible for the planning, design and refurbishment of synagogue premises.

C5 Eruv

C5.1 That the needs of the disabled and of young families be recognised and aided by the construction of an Eruv wherever appropriate.

D Community – We Recommend:

D1 Dialogue

The Review process created an opportunity for women across the community, regardless of age, religious affiliation and marital status, for an excellent cross-fertilisation of ideas and expertise and an increased sense of understanding and mutual respect.

D1.1 That the dialogue of women throughout the community be continued.

D2 The Establishment of a Standing Committee on Women's Issues

D2.1 That this Committee act as a point of reference in all future matters relating to women. The Standing Committee would be in a position to elicit women's opinions on a wide range of issues and to make recommendations to the appropriate religious authority and/or community organisation.

D3 Kashrut

D3.1 That there be worldwide standards and uniform procedures for Kashrut.

D3.2 That clearer labelling be produced for all kosher products.

D3.3 That more publicity be given by the Batei Din to the availability of permitted non-supervised food and household items for use on Pesach and throughout the year.

D4 Community Ombudsman

D4.1 The introduction of an Ombudsman to deal with appeals and complaints from people who believe that they have been badly treated by any section of a synagogue body – from local synagogue staff to the Beth Din.

D5 Women and Religious Ritual and Practice

It should be recognised that further positive involvement of women in religious ritual and practice will lead to greater participation of the whole family as this is often determined by the mother's attitude and practices – particularly relevant and important in single-parent families.

D5.1 It is therefore recommended that more ways be found within Halachah to involve women in the spiritual life of the community.

E Social and Welfare Issues – We Recommend:

E1 Community Centres

E1.1 That the concept of non-denominational Jewish Community Centres should be further explored to meet the cultural, social, educational and recreational needs of the community.

E2 “Yellow Pages”

E2.1 The production of a Jewish “Yellow Pages” Directory in each region, a comprehensive document, to list all community/welfare services, social groups and activities, special interest organisations, etc. to be widely available within the community and particularly to Rabbis, G.P.'s working in Jewish areas, social workers, community nurses, health visitors, counsellors, schools and libraries. To be regularly updated and financed by advertising space.

E3 Transport

E3.1 That additional coach services for visits to cemeteries and major community events be provided, with wider publicity to existing arrangements, paying particular attention to the special needs of the disabled and older members of the community.

E4 Access

E4.1 That proper consideration be given to the needs of people with disabilities regarding access to and facilities within all communal buildings.

E5 Bereavement Support

E5.1 That, whilst also acknowledging the value of bereavement counselling, each Synagogue enlists a group of men and women willing to offer immediate friendship and support to bereaved congregants.

E5.2 Jewish version of CRUSE: Encouragement for self-help networks for the bereaved.

E6 Home/Hospital Visiting

E6.1 A strengthening of community arrangements to identify and address the needs of the sick and elderly.

E7 Child Care

E7.1 That community facilities, including synagogue premises, be made available at an affordable rate to enable working mothers and single parents to leave their children in a safe and caring Jewish environment. Provision for care after school hours and during school holidays is of particular importance.

E7.2 That older women, with time available and a desire to be involved, be gainfully employed as “Jewish grannies” offering fulfilling part-time occupation and ameliorating staffing difficulties; that training and some payment be offered and funds set aside by the community for this purpose.

E8 Volunteers

E8.1 That professional training would enhance the standing of volunteers in the community. It would also raise standards and morale, and thereby encourage more people to volunteer their services and feel valued members of the community.

E9 Carers of Children with Special Needs

E9.1 That the appropriate Jewish agencies provide lay and professional community members with training to understand the needs of these carers. Help and counselling should be readily available to families with a child/children with special needs.

E10 Carers

E10.1 That local studies be carried out to identify carers, the majority of whom are women, and that encouragement be given to self-help support groups.

E11 Women who Suffer Abuse

In view of the pervasive myth of “the happy Jewish home”, many women trapped in violent and abusive situations are reluctant to reveal the facts.

E11.1 Women who Suffer Abuse: That the National JWA (Jewish Women’s Aid) be encouraged and supported in a programme of education in the community and enabled to develop and expand plans to help women affected by abuse.

E12 Health

E12.1 That increased provision be made in all Jewish schools for children with mild and moderate learning difficulties, with appropriate support from national and Jewish educational and welfare agencies.

E12.2 That improved health education be provided to Jewish children through synagogues, youth clubs, community centres, schools and Hebrew classes, given by trained professionals, as part of the regular Jewish educational programme. Fuller information is required for girls on the subject of the menstrual cycle.

E12.3 Sex education: That specific provision be made in the Jewish day school system for sex education, including information on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

E12.4 Drug misuse: That Jewish educators in the formal and informal sectors liaise with the Jewish AIDS Trust and appropriate drug agencies to educate the Jewish community on this increasing danger.

E12.5 Tay Sachs and other genetic diseases affecting Jewish people: That a feasibility study be undertaken on the advisability of a nationwide screening programme and the setting up of a central information bureau and database.

F Education – We Recommend:

F1 Family Education

F1.1 That the importance of family education be fully recognised and that programmes for family education be developed and well supported. Learning together as a family should be a major focus within individual communities.

F1.2 That synagogue services become a positive educational experience. Educational opportunities and resources should be made appropriate and easily accessible to meet the needs of women in following and understanding the synagogue service. Every Jewish educational programme should include “Following the Service”.

F2 Hebrew Language

F2.1 That, as the Hebrew language is a basic source of Jewish identity and a vital tool for furthering Jewish study, both learning and teaching Hebrew be promoted in a wide range of educational settings.

F3 Education for Girls

F3.1 That girls should be offered every opportunity to gain Jewish knowledge. Equality in education is imperative.

F4 Educational Organisations

F4.1 That organisations which provide educational opportunities co-operate and work together rather than duplicate efforts.

F4.2 That a main body co-ordinates and directs educational initiatives in order to suggest, implement and oversee programmes of learning in an efficient and cost effective manner.

F5 Shiurim

Whilst there is a need for basic/practical shiurim for women, there is also a need for shiurim which will help women grapple with issues that are directed specifically at women’s concerns, e.g. the obligation of a woman to perform mitzvot and to study Torah, women in the synagogue, etc.

F5.1 That three of the strands of women’s studies that should be targeted for development are Limmudei Kodesh, Jewish culture and Hebrew language, as basic and necessary tools for a sound Jewish education.

F6 Women's Adult Education

F6.1 That a greatly extended Jewish educational programme be on offer for women, delivered with a full range of options, enabling women to gain access to Halachah, and a true understanding of their own potential for ritual, study, and prayer.

F6.2 That women be encouraged to enter the highest levels of Jewish learning through the provision of appropriate courses for the achievement of this aim.

F7 Use of Technology in Religious Education

F7.1 The production of audio and video tapes, for purchase or loan, on prayer, ritual and other religious matters, which are particularly requested by women who wish to learn in the privacy of their own homes and are unable or unwilling to attend study groups.

F8 Women Teachers

F8.1 That the teaching of Jewish Studies be given higher status and that parents and schools should encourage girls to enter the teaching profession. Confident women teachers become excellent role models for Jewish girls.

F9 Jewish Educators

F9.1 That the urgent need for suitably qualified and charismatic Jewish educators in communities around the country be addressed.

F10 Informal Education

F10.1 Recognition of the important effect of cultural education on Jewish identity as provided by Women's and Zionist organisations, and the vital influence of Jewish assemblies and Jewish societies in mainstream schools.

F11 Special Needs

Since the Local Education Authorities may now take into account the denominational needs within a statement of special needs, Jewish women along with other members of the community must be aware of children with special needs and understand what their needs are. Parents should encourage schools and Jewish institutions to have an integrative policy towards special needs.

F11.1 That Jewish schools accept children with a statement of special needs so that they may be kept within a Jewish educational setting.

G Rabbis, Rebbetzins and the Batei Din – We Recommend:

G1 Congregational Rabbis

G1.1 That women be involved in the selection process in order to ensure that their needs are considered.

G2 Rabbis and Professional Development

G2.1 That Rabbis attend regular in-service training courses in order to enhance the quality of their pastoral care.

G2.2 That Rabbis and their wives receive professional training in the acquisition of and improvement in communication and counselling skills, with particular reference to inter-personal relationships relating to the many modern family problems with which they are presented.

G3 Training Programmes

G3.1 That mandatory attendance at training courses be arranged by a recognised Jewish religious authority e.g. Jews College, and that such training be included in the curriculum of all rabbinical and ministerial students prior to qualification.

G3.2 That, in line with other professional self-regulatory bodies, standards of professional competence be set and maintained by appropriate rabbinical authorities.

G3.4 That courses for Rabbis should include “women’s needs/issues”.

G4 Pastoral role

G4.1 That a clearer definition of the pastoral role of the Rabbi and the Rebbetzin be made to narrow the gap in expectation between congregant and minister.

G5 Role of Rebbetzins

G5.1 That the Rabbi’s wife be given the choice of whether or not she wishes to work for the community.

G5.2 That, if she wishes to be involved, she is given a formal contract of employment and adequate training and remuneration for the services she undertakes.

G5.3 That the services or roles she is not able to undertake be advertised so that they may be undertaken by others.

G6 Batei Din

It should be remembered that contact with a Beth Din usually occurs at a highly-charged emotional time in a person’s life.

G6.1 That flexible user-friendly office hours be introduced, i.e. evening appointments, e.g. for engaged couples to provide documents to the Registrar, if they are unable to take time off work during the day.

G6.2 That to promote greater understanding and co-operation between the Batei Din and petitioners, better communication methods be implemented to prevent unnecessary delays and feelings of anxiety and distress.

H Get and Agunah – We Recommend:

H1 Monitoring of Gittin

H1.1 That a Dayan be appointed to the London Beth Din with the single designated task of constantly monitoring and following-up cases of unresolved gittin.

H2 Pre-Nuptial Agreement

H2.1 That the pre-nuptial agreement, as announced by the Chief Rabbi, will now be a requirement for the solemnizing of all marriages in synagogues under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi.

H3 Coercion

H3.1 That the Chief Rabbi should issue guidelines on what is judged to be acceptable pressure to grant a Get.

H4 Get Counselling Service

H4.1 That a professional and appropriately funded Get Counselling Service should be established as a matter of priority in London and in the major centres of Jewish population.

H5 Jewish Family Mediation Service

H5.1 That a Jewish Family Mediation Service should be established in line with the recommendations of the Government's Green Paper.

H6 Training of Rabbis

H6.1 That both in preparation for communal service and as part of their on-going training, Rabbis should receive adequate instruction on Get counselling in situations of marital breakdown. Also, as an essential aspect of their pastoral care, Rabbis should be required to have a working knowledge of how best to refer couples for appropriate professional guidance.

H7 Recalcitrant Husbands

H7.1 That a recalcitrant husband should forfeit privileges within the community. Synagogues should be encouraged to deny congregational honours to such a husband

until he grants a Get. Communal organisations should likewise be encouraged to deny such individuals positions of leadership. Synagogues and communal bodies should be encouraged to include such provisions within their constitutions.

H7.2 Naming: That ways should be considered of publicising the names of recalcitrant husbands who unreasonably refuse to grant a Get.

H8 Unacceptable Practice

It is recognised that in certain cases Get or Chalitzah is withheld until there has been substantial payment of money or until unacceptable conditions have been agreed upon.

H8.1 That this practice is publicised as abhorrent and be denounced as alien to Jewish ethics.

H9 Administration

H9.1 That the whole system in which Get applications are processed should be computerised.

H9.2 That a straightforward guide for litigants explaining Get procedures should be drawn up and sent immediately upon application.

H9.3 That consideration should be given to ways of standardising and reducing the costs of obtaining a Get.

H10 Civil Law

H10.1 That further attempts should be made to seek legislation restricting the granting of a Decree Absolute of Divorce until all religious bars on remarriage have been removed.

H11 Halachah

H11.1 That the Chief Rabbi and Dayanim are respectfully urged to convene a gathering of worldwide halachic authorities with the courage and authority to decide how to implement all possibilities within Halachah which can prevent the occurrence of the status of Agunah.

H12 Mamzerut

It has been revealed that there are many cases of considerable distress resulting from the status of mamzer being perpetuated through the generations; the outcome of an Agunah being left with no option other than to make a subsequent union outside Orthodoxy.

The present situation relating to Agunot has, particularly over the past two decades, resulted in the birth of thousands of children halachically deemed mamzerim.