

# Communications

## WOMEN AT PRAYER

TO THE EDITOR:

Rabbi Schwartz devotes the bulk of his review of Rabbi Weiss's *Women at Prayer* (*Tradition*, 26:3, Spring 1992) to challenging the halakhic permissibility of saying the closing *berakha* after the Torah reading in women's prayer groups. But as important as the issue of an unnecessary blessing might be halakhically, it is not particularly relevant to the discussion at hand. Many groups do not say this *berakha* and, in any event, its permissibility—the subject of a valid halakhic disagreement—is hardly the core question in evaluating these prayer groups.

Rabbi Schwartz dismisses with the back of his hand Rabbi Weiss's rebuttal to the theoretical objections raised by the five *roshei yeshiva* at Yeshiva University without giving the reader any indication of where he thinks Rabbi Weiss fell short. And he offers no reason for supporting these five *talmidei hakhamim* in their rejection of the opinion of their teachers and masters, Rabbis Moshe Feinstein and Joseph B. Soloveitchick, who saw no theoretical objection to these groups, even though they included reading from a *sefer Torah*.

It is certainly true that, on a practical level, it would be unwise to cavalierly introduce any practice that would cause community division just because it violates no particular halakha. But the flip side of that argument is that when a community rabbi decides that the establishment of such a prayer group would enhance his Torah community, Rabbi Schwartz should be out front in defending his right, if not obligation, to do so.

Y. RIVKASON  
Jerusalem

TO THE EDITOR:

I read the review of Rabbi Avi Weiss's book with great sadness. I will leave the halakhic issues to more learned respondents, of whom, fortunately, an increasing number are women. Rabbi Schwartz expects women to submerge their needs—no matter how valid or how legitimate—in order to avoid fragmentation within the community. But does he apply his own standard of avoiding fragmentation to his own actions and those of his fellow rabbis?

TOBY FISHBEIN REIFMAN  
Englewood, NJ

TO THE EDITOR:

I wish to express my disagreement with Rabbi Schwartz's review of *Women At Prayer*, most particularly his assertion of "the serious possibility of community polarization."

Our Women's Prayer Group in Great Neck, NY, comprises women from both Orthodox synagogues. We share *minha* services on Shabbat, holidays and *semahot* with respect and warm friendship. What a joy it is to see Ashkenazic and Sephardic

women on Simhat Torah joining together to dance with the Torah. We have unity rather than polarization.

LOUIS KAHN  
Great Neck, NY

TO THE EDITOR:

Rather than an accurate review of Rabbi Weiss's book, I feel that Rabbi Schwartz's article was simply a presentation of this personal views with which I strongly disagree. Women's prayer services are, and must remain, a viable option in traditional Judaism.

My experiences at our prayer group in Denver and those of the other women who participate have been extremely rewarding and enriching. Using Rabbi Weiss's book as our guideline for our service, we have increased our learning, strengthened our spiritual connection to our Jewish practice, and formed even closer bonds to our congregation as a whole. In fact, the expanded opportunity for prayer which our group provides has served to draw many women closer to traditional Judaism.

While I recognize and respect Rabbi Schwartz's right to hold whatever personal opinion concerning the rules of prayer he chooses, it is presumptuous of him to measure the *value* of any practice to others! In dismissing the "possible benefits to the group involved" he is totally lacking in sensitivity and information.

SARA GILBERT  
Denver, CO