

# HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

## SERIES 3: 34 - WOMEN AND SIFREI TORAH - PART 2

OU ISRAEL/BEIT KENESSET HANASI - FALL 2025

- In Part 1 we saw some of the foundational halachic principles concerning contact with Sifrei Torah:
  - that the Sefer should be moved as little as possible and only where its own kavod is enhanced.
  - that people should move to greet the Torah and not vice versa
  - that the Sefer Torah is NOT susceptible to tuma and therefore any person who is tamei, including a woman in nidda is permitted to hold the Sefer and to read from it.
  - nevertheless, many communities, especially but not exclusively Ashkenazi, have throughout history (at least for 1000 years but probably more) maintained customs according to which women in nidda did not touch Sifrei Torah, go to the synagogue or, in some cases even daven or make berachot. While the fundamental halacha is not like these customs, the Rema records that women in his time did not come to the synagogue when actually menstruating and did not look at the writing in the Torah during hagba'a.
  - an exception to this custom was the Yamim Nora'im (and similar public occasions such as a family wedding) when such women would be permitted to come to the synagogue in it would cause 'itzavon gadol' - great sadness for them not to come. This exception was also based on the talmudic precedent of giving 'nachat ruach' to women and enabling them to take part in events which they very much wanted to be part of, where such participation was technically permitted although usually not done.
  - it was also clear that the custom not to come to shul was only when actually menstruating and not during the 7 clean days, even though the woman was no less tamei until she went to the mikve.
  - the above-mentioned exceptions suggested to some commentators that the underlying issue may not have been tuma per se but the challenges to personal hygiene in those times caused by menstruation.
- In this shiur we will look briefly at the question of handing the Sefer Torah to women to take through the women's section of the shul on its journey from and back to the aron kodesh. We will also examine in more depth the often divisive issue of women dancing with the Sefer Torah on Simchat Torah<sup>1</sup>.

### A] TAKING THE SEFER TORAH AROUND THE WOMEN'S SECTION

- Some communities have adopted a practice of passing the Sefer Torah into the women's section so that it can be carried around that section by a woman<sup>2</sup> and other women can kiss it as the men do. It is then past back to the men to proceed with Keriyat haTorah.
- This raises a number of halachic and hashkafic questions including (i) unnecessary movement of the Sefer Torah; and (ii) touching of the Sefer Torah by women, some of whom may be niddot.

1. ומה ששאל .... אם רשאים בשמחת תורה להכניס ס"ת לעזרת נשים לנשקם. הנה לכאורה יש להביא מהא דחגיגה (טז:) פעם אחת ה' לנו עגל של זבחי שלמים והביאנוהו לעזרת נשים וסמכו עליו נשים לא מפני סמיכה בנשים אלא כדי לעשות נח"ר לנשים. הרי דמפני נחת רוח לנשים הביאו קרבן לעזרת נשים .... יש שכתבו שאין לאשה נדה בימי ראיתה ליכנס לבית הכנסת או להתפלל או להזכיר ה' או ליגע בספר ואף על פי שרמ"א כ' דהעיקר דמותרים מכ"מ העיד דנוהגים להחמיר. וגם אם לא נוהגים להחמיר בתפלה למה לו לתקן שיגעו וינשקו ס"ת ויש בהם כמה נדות - ולפעמים הם בפריצות - ואף על פי שאינו דומה למש"כ אחרונים שלא יסתכלו אז בכתב של ס"ת כשמגביהים - מ"מ לתקן להם תקנה זאת לא נראה לענ"ד.

ש"ת שבט הלוי חלק ו סימן עג

Rav Vosner discusses bringing the Sifrei Torah into the Ezrat Nashim on Simchat Torah so that the women could kiss them. Although he seems to acknowledge that this is permitted m'ikar hadin, and he also cites the precedent of innovating in some areas to bring nachat ruach to the women, he does not feel this is appropriate. He is concerned for the issue of women in nidda touching the Torah and also the possibility that women may be improperly dressed, causing a lack of kavod haTorah.

1. For a detailed and informative article on this see <https://www.deracheha.org/dancing-with-torah/>; some of the contemporary sources on this sheet were taken from that article. See also R. Gill Student's article on this at <https://www.torahmusings.com/2014/10/women-torah-scrolls/>.

2. For a man to walk into and around the women's section would call into question the relevance and halachic validity of the mechitza separating men and women.

2. והנה בענינו מיירי שהספר תורה נשאר בעזרת גברים ולא מטלטלים אותו למקום אחר שלא לצורך, וגם מיירי במקום ובאופן שיקפידו על הצניעות, וכן מכיון שלא מכניסים את הספר תורה לתוך העזרת נשים, אם כן מי שמקפידה שלא לגעת בספר תורה בזמן הנדה תוכל שלא להתקרב מבלי שירגישו בכך. ואם כן נראה שמעיקר הדין אם באמת עומדים בכל התנאים יש מקום להקל בכך, אם אין חשש שהדבר עלול לגרום לפרצה. אלא שבכל זאת נראה לאסור משום שלצורך זה יצטרכו להיות זמן מסויים בלי מחיצה המפרדת ..... וצ"ע אם למעשה אפשר להקל בכך מכיון שעלולים לצמוח מזה פרצות בצניעות.

חשוקי חמד חגיגה ט"ז

*R. Yitzchak Zilberstein is prepared to give a very limited heter to carrying the Sefer Torah around the men's section so that the women can reach over and kiss it. He is not, however, prepared to have the Sefer passed over the mechitza and is also concerned at the possibility of a negative impact on the decorum and modesty in the shul.*

3. בכפור, בשמיני עצרת ובשמחת תורה מוציאים בכל בתי-הכנסת את כל ספרי-התורה מבית-גנום ומניחים אותם ב'היכל'. והאנשים והנשים הולכים מבית-כנסת לבית-כנסת לנשק כל ספר וספר.

מסע בבל לרב דוד ששון, מצוטט ביערי עמ' 252

*Rav David Sasson reports that in Baghdad women would be able to kiss the Sefer Torah on certain holidays.*

4. אחד מתלמידי הנאנמים סיפר לי שפעם שאל את אבא למה הוא מקפיד לנשק את ספר התורה. הוא ציפה לשמוע תשובה בסגנון 'כי במסכת סופרים כתוב כך', אך אבא ענה לו בפשטות: 'כי יהודי רוצה לנשק ספר תורה'.

רב משה ליכטנשטיין, 'בכל לבי דרשתי', אשרי אדם עוז לו בד', עורך חיים נבון, (תל אביב: ידיעות אחרונות, 2018), 93

*Unconnected to the specific issue of women and the Sefer Torah, Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein, in a eulogy for his father, R. Aharon Lichtenstein, highlights the emotional connection of the Jew to the Sefer Torah.*

5. The mehitzah of our new shul in Riverdale is built in such a way that when the Torah is carried through the men's section. it is virtually impossible for the women to kiss it. .... A group of women asked that the Torah be cared through the ezrat nashim. They were sincere, sensitive people whose request was deep and real. Since it was felt that it would be immodest for the Hazzan to walk through the women's "domain," it was decided that after the Torah is taken through the men's area, that it be transferred to a woman who would then carry the Torah through the women's section. As expected, the decision promoted much discussion. The intensity of the debate was indicative of the seriousness of the issue and the earnestness of those deliberating the matter. A few women who had never been accustomed to this procedure were upset. Women who were excited by their involvement had difficulty understanding the feelings of those women who were hesitant or even loathe to come near the Torah. The penning of this essay is in part prompted by the need for all involved to clearly understand the halakhic concerns related to this matter.

R. Avi Weiss, Women and Sifrei Torah, Tradition 20(2), Summer 1982, p118 (fn 40)

6. Can the Torah be passed into the women's section at shul?  
This question is essentially communal, and its ramifications for the community's identity, cohesion, and avodat Hashem play a major part in any decision. Arriving at a balanced decision entails consultation with a local religious authority who is in position to judge what will be of most spiritual benefit to the specific community. In cases like these, communal customs and norms can have greater halachic weight than written sources. ....  
.... Jews are duty bound to show a sefer Torah honor when it passes by (Yoreh De'a 282), though one can debate whether deliberately trotting the Torah scroll around the synagogue is the greatest show of respect to it (Yalkut Yosef Keri'at Ha-Torah 134: Hotza'at Ve-hagbahat Ha-Torah 10). Given that most communities try to enable as many male congregants as possible to come close to the Torah during the processional, there is no strict halachic reason to deny women the opportunity to come close to the Torah. This sort of closeness to the Torah can be spiritually significant.  
In some synagogues, the male carrier of the Torah deliberately passes next to the mechitza or the entrance of the women's section so that woman who desire to touch and kiss the Torah have the opportunity to do so.  
Ultimately, as stated above, whether the Torah should be carried through the women's section (and how to manage it) is a communal decision that depends on the nature, character, and customs of the community. If a community does reach a decision to pass the Torah through the women's section, it is preferable for reasons of modesty for a woman to carry the Torah through a woman's section rather than have a man march through it. Also, the logistics of passing the Torah should be treated with sensitivity (one possibility might be to place the Torah down first), so as to minimize mixing between genders in synagogue and to avoid touching.

<https://www.deracheha.org/answers/passing-torah-to-women/>

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit [www.rabbimanning.com](http://www.rabbimanning.com)

**B] DANCING WITH THE SEFER TORAH ON SIMCHAT TORAH - ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOM**

7. מצוה להרבות בשמחה זו. ולא היו עושין אותה עמי הארץ וכל מי שירצה, אלא גדולי חכמי ישראל וראשי הישיבות והסנהדרין והחסידים והזקנים ואנשי מעשה הם שהיו מרקדין ומספקין ומנגנין ומשמחין במקדש בימי חג הסוכות. אבל כל העם האנשים והנשים כולן באין לראות ולשמע.

רמב"ם שופר וסוכה ולולב ח"ד

*The exceptional simcha of Succot in the Temple was accompanied by spirited dancing each night at the Simchat Beit HaShoeva. But the dancing was reserved for the leaders of the community; other people watched and enjoyed. There is also no reference to the dancing involving Sifrei Torah, which is to be expected since the celebration of Simchat Torah on 2nd date Shemini Atzeret came far later.*

8. ואלו הן משום שבות - ..... ולא מטפחין ולא מספקין ולא מרקדין ....

משנה ביצה ה"ב

*The Rabbis prohibited dancing on Yom Tov as a rabbinic gezeira in case someone picked up and tuned/fashioned a musical instrument.*

9. ובי"ט שני זה שהוא אחרון רגילין אצלנו שמרקדין אפילו כמה זקנים בשעה שאומרים קלוסין לתורה אלא שזו משום שבות הוא ונהגו בה היתר ביום זה בלבד לכבוד התורה.

תשובות הגאונים - שערי תשובה סימן שיד

*The Geonim record that, by their time, the custom of Simchat Torah had developed and dancing for the mitzva was specifically allowed as an exception to the regular prohibition on Yom Tov<sup>3</sup>.*

10. הגה: וקורין יום טוב האחרון 'שמחת תורה' לפי ששמחין ועושין זו סעודת משתה לגמרה של תורה. .... ועוד נהגו צמדינות אלו להוליא צמחת תורה ערבית ושחרית כל ספרי תורה שצביכל ואומרים זמירות ותשצחות, וכל מקום לפי מנהגו. ועוד נהגו להקיף עם ספרי התורה הצומח שצצית הכנסת, כמו שמקיפים עם הלולב, והכל משום שמחה.

אורח חיים הלכות לולב תרס"א

*The Rema (16th century Poland) notes that the custom had evolved to take out all the Sifrei Torah and sing praises of the Torah. In some places the custom was to process around the bima with the Torah as a zecher to the hakafot in the Temple. There is still no specific reference here to dancing WITH the Sifrei Torah.*

- The custom to dance 7 full circuits around the Sefer Torah is attributed to the Ari z'l (16th century) as a kabbalistic custom

11. תחילה וראש יניחו ס"ת בתיבה ויהיה אצלו ירא שמים וידו אוחזת בס"ת כ"ז ההקפות כי כן קבלתי מהמקובל המופלא מהר"ש שרעבי זלה"ה שהיה מקפיד על זה ...

צפורן שמיר סימן יב אות רז

*Yet the Chida (18th century Italy) quotes in the name of the Rashash - a leading kabbalist of his time - that the Torah would be held by a senior member of the congregation while others danced.*

12. מעלת ריבוי השמחה לפני הס"ת והכנסתו לחופה  
ו] ..... וכן לענין השמחה כל המרבה בכל מיני שמחות לפני הספר תורה מעורר השמחה למעלה אם הבנים שמחה וששון ויקר. ועל כן מוציאים הספרי תורה ומעמידים אותם בתוך חופתם ועושים תחילה שמחה גדולה לפני הספרים כחתן וכלה הנכנסים בתוך חופתם הוא .... ועל כן יזהרו מאד לעשות חופה להם כי חס ושלוש מגרעות נתן למעלה.

מנהג שתי"ח נוטלין ס"ת מחופתם בשירה ומקיפין התיבה ז"פ

ז] ואחר כך יקחו גדולי ישראל חכמי התורה הספרי תורה מתוך חופתם ויפתחו פיהם בנועם קול בשיר ושבחה הלל וזמרה והודות לה' לפני הספרי תורה. ויקיפו בהם את התיבה שבע הקפות כנגד שבע הקפות דהושענא רבא ....

התעוררות להרבות שמחה לפני הס"ת ומנהג האר"י בזה

ט] וראוי לכל עבד ה' לרבות כל מיני שמחות לפני הספרי תורה בריקוד ומפזז ומכרכר בשירים נאים ולא יחוש על כבוד תורתו שמא ילעיגו עליו ויתבזה בעיני המוני העם. כי אף אם הוא גדול בתורה אולם דוד מלכא משיחא יגדל ממנו הרבה מאד ואף על פי כן בשעה שהעלה הארון הקדוש לירושלים היה מכרכר בכל עוז לפני ה' ....

חמדת ימים סוכות פרק ח אות ו - ט

3. The prohibition is a shevut deshevut - double rabbinic prohibition since YT2 is rabbinic. As such it would normally be permitted for a mitzva.

*Sefer Chemdat Yamim*<sup>4</sup> records that the kabbalistic custom in his time was for the Torah Sages of the community to hold the scrolls while the 'ovdei Hashem' danced wildly in front of them and other people look on.

13. הוא ראה דאנשי צורה הנכבדים אינם נושאים הספרי תורה להקיף בהם, רק המון העם וילדים, ואינם נוהגים בהם כבוד תורה כדת מה לעשות. ראה והתקין שיוציאו בלילה ז' ספרים לבד וביום ז' ספרים ובמנחה ז' ספרים.

ש"ת שמחה לאיש א"ח סימן ד

*R. Ya'akov Elyashar (Sefardic Chief Rabbi in Eretz Yisrael in the late 19th century) reports that the Rav in Bucharest tried to stop the Sifrei Torah being passed around and carried by the regular people and children in the shul as this was leading to a reduction in kavod haTorah.*

## C] WOMEN'S DANCING WITH THE TORAH

14. דיש לשמוח לרבים בכל מה דאפשר בשמחה של מצוה [בשמחת תורה].

אליה רבה סימן תרסט

*There is a general imperative to maximize simcha on Simchat Torah, of course only in an appropriate, halachically permitted and hashkafically authentic manner.*

15. מנהג נשים בין מנחה למעריב הנ"ל [ליל שמחת תורה] באין במלבושיהן היקרים והנאים הטובים שיש להם. ובאים בחדר החיצון של בית הכנסת לפני פתח החיצון של בית הכנסת דנשים. ורוב הנשים, בפרט נשים בחורות, מחברות יד ליד ובראשן נשי חתן תורה וחתן בראשית, והולכין עיגול סביב ומשוררין 'גדל' ומירות שרגילים לשורר לכבוד חתן וכלה ...

ר' יוסף יוזפא הלוי שמש ק"ק וורמייזא במאה ה-17, מצוטט אברהם יערי תודות חג שמחת תורה (1964) עמ' 210

*The women of 17th century Worms would to dance in honor of the Torah late on the afternoon of Shemini Atzeret.*

16. עצם השמחה בודאי שמותר כולל כמובן ריקודים וכפיים. הבעיה מתעוררת כאשר מבקשים לרקוד עם ספרי תורה ...

רב אברהם יוסף 'שמחת תורה לנשים' ש"ת מורשת תשע"ד

*The issue of women dancing and celebrating on Simchat Torah is not controversial. Here, R. Avraham Yosef clearly rules that the women should be included in the dancing and clapping. The problem arises when the women wish to do this with Sifrei Torah.*

## C1] CONCERNS OF NIDDA

17. כל הטמאים קורין בתורה וקורין ק"ש ומתפללין חוץ מבעלי קרי שהוציאו עזרא מכל הטמאים ואסרו בין בד"ת בין בק"ש ותפלה עד שיטבול כדי שלא יהיו ת"ח מצויין אצל נשותיהן כתרנגולין. ואח"כ בטלו אותה תקנה והעמידו הדבר על הדין, שאף בעל קרי מותר בד"ת ובקריאת שמע ובתפלה בלא טבילה ובלא רחיצה דתשעה קבין, וכן פשט המנהג. הגב: יש שכתבו שאין לאשה נדה צימי ראייתה ליכנס לבית הכנסת או להתפלל או להזכיר השם או ליגע בספר. וי"א שמותרת בכל, וכן עיקר (נשי הלכות נדה). אצל המנהג צמדינות אלו כסדר ראשונה, וצימי לצון נהגו היתר. ואפילו במקום שנהגו להחמיר, צימים נוראים וכו"ג, שרצים מתאספים לילך לבית הכנסת, מותרין לילך לבהכ"נ כשאר נשים. כי הוא לכן ענין גדול שהכל מתאספים וכן יעמדו חוץ (פסקי מהר"א סי' קל"ב).

אורח חיים הלכות קריאת שמע פ"א

*The Mechaber rules that those who are tamei are permitted to daven, learn and go to shul. The Rema adds that, although this is indeed the strict halacha, the custom in his time was for women during their actual days menstruation not to go to shul or even to daven or say berachot at all. However, during her 7 clean days there was no custom to be strict. The Rema also quotes the psak of the Terumat Hadeshen to be lenient for all women during the Yamim Noraim, since to prevent them access to the shul on such days would cause 'great sadness' - עצבון גדול.*

4. Chemdat Yamim was a compilation of laws and customs concerning Shabbat and the festivals, based mostly on the teachings of the Arizal and his students. Its author is anonymous and it was first printed by R. Yisrael Algazi in Izmir in 1731. It quickly became popular among Sefardic communities but the anonymity of the author led to suspicions that it make be a Sabbatean text and this was the position of R. Ya'akov Emden. Certain sections of the book do seem to support this possibility, including songs spelling the acrostic 'Natan HaAzati'! Professor Moshe Fogel (Hebrew University) follows the view of Avraham Yaari that the sources are not Sabbatean, whereas Boaz Huss (Ben Gurion University) follows the view of Gershon Scholem and his student Isaiah Tishby, who wrote four articles arguing that the book consisted of Sabbatean sources. Nevertheless, the book was later quoted by many commentators, especially in the world of Chassidut. It has been suggested that the author was R. Binyamin HaLevi (1580-1671) who studied under the talmidim of the Arizal. For more on this see:

- <https://web.archive.org/web/20100621045335/>

- [http://shturem.net/index.php?section=blog\\_new&article\\_id=165&lang=hebrew](http://shturem.net/index.php?section=blog_new&article_id=165&lang=hebrew)

- <https://library.osu.edu/projects/hebrew-lexicon/hbe/hbe00714.php>

18. .... Another aspect of the problem, which although it is not connected specifically to Simchat Torah and to the hakafot, is still directly connected to the question of what should be the practical custom in this matter [of women dancing with the Torah]. I mean the halacha brought in Shulchan Aruch OC 88, which relates to women in certain circumstances [ie nidda] regarding visiting synagogue and the Sefer Torah, etc... "for it will be a great anguish for them when everyone gathers but they stand outside." One should note that the question there deals with entering the synagogue; even then, anguish is not enough [to permit it], but only 'great anguish.' We see from this that in such matters, especially regarding the Sefer Torah, we have no power or authority to create new customs... and certainly not to permit holding hakafot with a Sefer Torah [for women].

Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson, letter to Rav Shlomo Riskin, 13 Kislev 1976

• We saw in Part 1 that this concern has been voiced for over a thousand years and has been taken very seriously by poskim. However, there are a number of reasons<sup>5</sup> why it may not be as relevant to the specific issue of women dancing with the Sefer Torah:

(i) The Rema brings two opinions - permissive and restrictive - and rules that the halacha follows the permissive position but the custom in 16th century Poland follows the restrictive view. First, it is clear that this is not the minhag today in most communities in which all women come to shul<sup>6</sup>. Second, the restrictive view also prohibits women from praying, saying berachot, etc. It is very clear that this is NOT accepted in any community today, so can one element of this position be separated and preserved when the others are not?

(ii) The concern of nidda related only to the women actually carrying or touching the Sefer, not to those dancing around them.

(iii) The Rema rules that the restrictive position only applies to women who are actually menstruating. It does not apply to younger women who have not begun menstruating or post-menopausal women who have stopped. It also does not apply to women who are in their 7 clean days prior to mikve or who are currently tahorot. As such, the concern is with a very small proportion of women. Should all women be told that they cannot dance with the Sefer because of this small percentage for whom it is a potential problem? Or should the women for whom it is a concern be trusted to avoid carrying the actual Torah? At women's hakafot, most women do not touch the Sefer and it should be possible for women to avoid that if nidda is relevant without drawing attention to themselves.

(iv) The Rema is lenient on the Yamim Noraim and similar occasions (later poskim include to family semachot) when large numbers of women come to shul. Simchat Torah would seem to fall into that category today. The reason for this leniency is that there will be 'great anguish' for women who are excluded from shul. Is this objectively or subjectively defined? If some women say that they do feel this way is it for others to say they do not? On the other hand, no one is being excluded from shul so would this leniency apply to women who feel excluded from an activity within shul? Since the underlying justification is also build on the precedent of bring 'nachot ruach' to women (based on the talmudic precedent of allowing women to do semicha on a korban - also an activity within the Temple), it would seem that this consideration should apply to women's hakafot.

(v) According to those views that entire issue may relate to personal hygiene and not to halachic issues of tuma, the concern is minimal today.

(vi) To what extent does the position of the Rema and Ashkenazi custom relate to Sefardic communities?

## C2] CONCERNS OF KAVOD HATORAH

19. לא ידוע מהו מקור המנהג של הגברים לרקוד עם ספרי התורה. המנהג המקורי היה להקיף את ספרי התורה המונחים על הבימה ..... הריקוד עם ספרי התורה יש בו בעיות רבות. הוא גורם לקלות ראש ביחס לספרים. הוא אחת הסיבות לפסילתם של הספרים .... מדוע אפוא נשים מעוניינות לנהוג דוקא מנהג שיש עליו עוררין? .... אם אכן נשים רוצות לשמוח שמחה אמיתית בשמחת תורה, הייתי מציע להן לעשות זאת בפני עצמן, באוירה שלהן ובמקום משלהן. שם תשמחנה ותרקודנה, סביב התורה, כמנהג המקורי, ולא עם התורה.

רב יעקב אריאל, 'נשיות מקורית מול חיקוי' - הלכה בימינו, עמ' 252-253<sup>7</sup>

*R. Ya'akov Ariel, formerly Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan, was opposed to any extending of what he saw as problematic custom of men to dance WITH, rather than AROUND, the Sefer Torah. He therefore recommended that women dance around the Torah and not with it.*

5. See <https://dafaleph.com/home/2016/10/20/on-women-dancing-with-a-torah-scroll-on-simchat-torah-an-analysis-of-an-often-misused-rem> for more on this.

6. This is attested to by the Mishna Berura (88:7).

7. See the full response at <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/ask/1197>

20. מעתה נראה לפי עניות דעתי שאם הקהל רוצה להנהיג לעשות נחת רוח לנשים [חגיגה טז:] בשמחת תורה, ומתוך כך יבואו לתקן שבעזרת נשים אחת הנשים החשובות תחזיק בספר, ואחרות תרקודנה לפניו דרך כבוד והידור - ודאי שיש בזה תיקון. והוא תיקון שאין בו איסור כלל שהרי מעולם לא נאסר על הנשים להחזיק ספר תורה. ושמה ילמדו מכך גם הגברים לנהוג בכבוד הראוי!

הרב נחום רבינוביץ, שו"ת שיה נחום מ

*R. Nachum Rabinowitz<sup>8</sup> proposes a similar solution - that the women should dance around a woman holding the Torah - and hopes that this more proper minhag will also spread to the men!*

### C3] CONCERNS OF CHANGING THE SYNAGOGUE CUSTOM

21. יש בזה [הקפות לנשים ותפילות נשים] משום שינוי ברור ומאד בולט ממסורת אבותינו, ומשום פורץ גדר במנהגי ישראל ופורש מדרכי הציבור. ובפרט יש קפידא מיוחדת בנוגע למנהגי בית הכנסת ..... ואחר העיון והדיון במתינות בחבורה עם כמה מר"מי הישיבה, נראה ברור שכל ההנהגות הנ"ל אסורות ..... ובפרט ענין מנהגי בית הכנסת החמירו האחרונים ביותר, אשר דינו כמקדש מעט. ....

רב צבי שכטר, בעקבי הצאן 5, עמ' 32

*Rav Hershel Schachter opposed women's hakafot with a Sefer Torah and women's tefilla groups since these represented a significant shift in minhag Yisrael. This is something about which (in light of pressure from the Reform and Conservative movements) most 20th century poskim were very concerned, particular in the area of synagogue practice.*

22. הרב ליכטנשטיין אמר: 'אני לא הייתי מתיר בקהילה הקפות עם ספר תורה לנשים. אם יש מקום לדון, זה במדרשה'. (ובמגדל עוז הוא לא התיר). לדעתו מדרשה זה מקום סגור ואיננו חלק מבית כנסת. לדעתו איסור לשנות מנהגי בית כנסת.

רב יוסף צבי רימון<sup>9</sup>

*Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon reports that Rav Aharon Lichtenstein did NOT permit women's hakafot with a Sefer in the shul. If there were a place for these, he felt it was potentially appropriate in the Midrasha<sup>10</sup>.*

23. אין איסור לנשים לרקוד עם ספר תורה, בתנאי שנוהגות בו כבוד כראוי. אבל מצד שני אין לשנות מנהג של הקהילה בלי הסכמת רוב הציבור. ברוב הקהילות לא נהגו הנשים לרקוד עם ספר תורה בשמחת תורה, ואם רוצים לשנות את המנהג צריך לשאול את דעת הציבור. כמובן שאם יש רב בקהילה, אין לעשות שום דבר בלי הסכמתו.

הרב נחום רבינוביץ, שו"ת שיה נחום מ

*In the continuation of his teshuva (above) R. Rabinowitz writes that there is no problem in principle with women dancing with a Sefer Torah<sup>11</sup> if proper kavod haTorah is respected. However, the custom in a shul cannot and must not be changed unless the majority of the kehilla and the rav of the community approve.*

24. An associated issue, although technically totally different, is the permissibility of women dancing in the synagogue with Torah scrolls during hakafot on Simhat Torah. This practice has been opposed by all contemporary rabbinic authorities. My revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik, told me that he opposed this practice when questioned by synagogues in Brookline, Massachusetts, and New York City. The basis for this ruling, he told me, is that the Talmud in Berachot [63a] which says that just as there is an etiquette that regulates one's behaviour when visiting someone else's home, so too there is a tradition that regulates behaviour in the synagogue. Thus, for example, eating in the synagogue is not permitted. An element of proper synagogue behaviour, such as the prohibition against eating in the synagogue, is explicated in legal detail by the Talmud and by subsequent codes of Jewish law. The same applies to the introduction of innovations which our ancestors considered to be in conflict with the feeling of respect and awe owed to the synagogue. Proper synagogue behaviour is determined by practice and tradition. Since it has been the age-old practice of synagogues that women do not dance with Torah scrolls during hakafot, the introduction of this practice would be a violation of synagogue etiquette.

R. Moshe Meiselman, *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (New York, 1978), p. 146

8. See his full teshuva at <http://www.ybm.org.il/Admin/uploaddata/LessonsFiles/Pdf/9592.pdf>

9. This is cited on <https://www.deracheha.org/dancing-with-torah/> as a personal response to the Deracheha editor, presumably Rabbanit Laurie Novick

10. As to the actual position of R. Aharon Lichtenstein concerning women's hakafot in Migdal Oz, Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon says that he permitted dancing with Torah scrolls in the midrasha after consulting with Rabbi Lichtenstein. According to him, Rabbi Lichtenstein permitted this only in the midrasha and not in a synagogue in the community. (R. Zev Weitman, current Rav of Alon Shevut, writes that he does not understand the distinction between midrasha and the women's section in the synagogue). Rav Lichtenstein's daughter - Rabbanit Esti Rosenberg, who is Rosh Midrasha of Migdal Oz, relates that when there was talk about bringing a Torah scroll into the midrasha, her father said there is no prohibition for girls to dance with Torah scrolls although, even so, he recommended not to do this. Therefore, at that Torah dedication ten years ago in Midreshet Migdal Oz the girls did not dance with Torah scrolls. However, at a later Torah dedication in Migdal Oz after R. Lichtenstein had passed away, the matter was discussed again, and it was decided by the current Rosh Yeshiva at Har Etzion and by Rabbanit Esti (both of whom knew Rav Lichtenstein's position ten years earlier) to change from his recommendation and rely on his halakhic psak and allow the women to dance with a Torah scroll, which is what was done. The Midrasha also now holds hakafot for the women with Sifrei Torah.

11. R. Rabinowitz noted above the manner in which he recommended the women's dancing to be set up - with women dancing around a senior woman holding the Torah.

- This is widely acknowledged to have been the position of Rav Solovetichik<sup>12</sup> and is reflected in the psak of many of his talmidim.
- The Lubavitcher Rebbe was also very clear in his 1976 letter to R. Shlomo Riskin (see above) that we have no power or authority to innovate in synagogue practice. He also distinguishes between what could be acceptable in a private home as opposed in public in shul.<sup>13</sup>

25. I think that women's dancing with a sefer Torah in the women's section is desirable today. Twenty to thirty years ago it was not desirable. The reason for this is twofold: Changes in prayer custom and synagogue standards need to occur in a gradual, and not revolutionary, fashion. As additional changes have occurred in women's participation and involvement in synagogue, this change adds on to a broader process and fits the current reality in a way that I sense did not exist twenty to thirty years ago. My catchphrase: "Evolution and not revolution" is very correct here. Furthermore, I feel that the advances that have occurred in this time period in women's Talmud Torah also make this change necessary. As long as the connection to Torah increases each year, so does the justification and expectation to dance with a sefer Torah on Simchat Torah. I would say this change is necessary even without this point, but this point certainly increases the justification for it. Additionally, dancing with a sefer Torah is not just a privilege but a challenge. If women expect to dance with a sefer [on Simchat Torah], it will also lead to expectations of occupying themselves with Torah over the course of the year.

R. Mosheh Lichtenstein, Responsum to Deracheha<sup>14</sup>

- The concern not to innovate synagogue practice clearly became more pronounced in the 19th and 20th centuries with the rise of the Reform and Conservative movement and the radical changes that they introduced, including in synagogue practice.
- However, it is ironic that this should be specifically raised concerning changes on Simchat Torah, when the entire practice on this day arose as a result of new and innovative (post talmudic) synagogue practices: ending/beginning the Torah on this day (7/8th century), hakafot (16th century), dancing (17th century), dancing in front of the Torah (18th century), dancing with the Torah (20th century).

26. ... we have also answered our second question, as to whether we are permitted to create new *minhagim* that were not known to previous generations. There is no doubt that new customs that were not known before, and were instituted because of the social and educational changes that have taken place, are not contrary to the *minhagim* of previous generations. ....

One may well illustrate the point with the help of two responsa in the work of my teacher, Gaon R. Yehiel Ya'akov Weinberg, of blessed memory. In one of the responsa ... he discusses the question of whether it is permissible, in order to eliminate the pain caused by circumcision, to administer some form of anesthetic .... In another responsum he discusses the question of the Bat Mitzva celebration for girls ....

In both responsa the problem is the same; i.e. is one permitted to introduce new *minhagim* that were not practiced before? In the first question he reaches the conclusion that no anesthetics may be given to eliminate the pain of circumcision. He argues that the possibility of administering a drug to enable a person to endure the circumcision painlessly existed even in talmudic times. Yet it was not done. Therefore it should not be done today either. He concludes with the words: *Minhag Yisrael Torah hi ....*

As to the second question, he fully supports the introduction of the Bat Mitzvah celebration .... The difference between the two cases is clear. In the first case, there has been no change whatever in the conditions of the times. The problem has always existed. The possibility of eliminating the pain by means of some drug .... has always been available. Yet the rabbis did not make use of it. That means that they were against it .... As for Bat Mitzvah, the nonpracticing of it in former times did not establish a *minhag*. .... Today, however, conditions have changed. The Bat Mitzvah celebration does not abolish anything; it does not antagonize any *minhag*. It has a meaningful function in the context of Torah observance.

R. Eliezer Berkovits, Jewish Women in Time and Torah, pp 79-81

#### C4] CONCERN FOR BROADER META-HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES

- Halacha is NOT the sole determinant as to whether something is practically permitted, let alone desirable. Halachic values, meta-halachic considerations (such as the push for stringency or leniency), and hashkafic sensitivities are also relevant.
- By definition, these values are less clear and are open to interpretation and manipulation.

12. Rabbi Meiselman is known to have a more conservative view of his uncle's positions than most of the Rav's talmidim and is sometimes accused of misrepresenting those positions. Nevertheless, this quotation also appeared in 1978 in a book forming part of R. Norman Lamm's Library of Jewish Law and Ethics. Although R. Lamm explicitly states in his foreword that he did not agree with everything in this book, the inclusion of this quotation in the volume indicates that R. Lamm considered it to be accurate.

13. See a detailed analysis by R. Baruch Oberlander of R. Schneersohn's letter at <http://www.haoros.com/Archive/index.asp?cat=11&haoro=7&kovetz=902>

14. See <https://www.deracheha.org/dancing-with-torah/> for the original Hebrew. See also the psak of the Beit Hillel movement at <https://beithillel.org.il/1845-2/>

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27. וכמה מסוכן הוא הדרך של הריסות הסדרים הישנים והחרבתם בשביל להביא איזה תיקונים נחוצים, כי בהתפשט מנהג כזה יקומו ממבואם כל עז פנים וכל ריק ופוחז. ויתישא להעמיד חזון במה שישלח יד בכל דבר מתוקן ומקובל, עד שהטהרה הרצויה וההולכת בדרך התורה היא חלילה תבטל מפני פחזות הפוחזים והדייטים הקופצים בראש.

רב אברהם יצחק קוק, עין עיה שבת א', עמ' 48

How perilous is the path that tears down the old foundations, that shatters the structures of order in the name of some needed repair. For once such a custom spreads, the brazen of spirit, the empty and the reckless, will rush in through the breach, pretending to bear a vision, while laying hands on all that is whole, all that has been sanctified and received. And thus, God forbid, the purity sought, the purity that walks in the way of Torah, may be cast aside, swept away by the folly of the rash and the clamor of the unlearned who thrust themselves to the front.

*Rav Kook spells out the dangers of shattering the foundations of Jewish tradition in order to achieve some perceived need for repair. Many will join in breaking down the traditions of the past and few will be willing or able to build the future.*

28. כשפורצים גדרים של דורות הקודמים שעמדו נגד התפשטות החכמות בישראל, לשם שמים, מאירים על ידי זה אורו של משיח, הנקרא בן פרצי. ועל ידי מה שסובלים כל האימים והבזיונות ומניעות הכבוד הבאים על ידי זה מיראי ד' פשוטים, זוכים לבחינת יחידה, כמו שזוכין במסירת נפש בפועל על קידוש השם. ומכפרים על ידי היסורים הללו על כל העולם כולו, ועונות הדור מתהפכים לזכויות, וסניגורים רבים עומדים על כל חכמי ישראל לזכותם בזכותם את כל ישראל

רב אברהם יצחק קוק, קבצים מכתב יד קדשו כרך יא

When we break, for the sake of Heaven, through the barriers of former generations that stood against the spread of wisdom in Israel, we kindle the Messiah's light - called ben Partzi (breacher of boundaries). And through suffering all the threats, humiliations and dishonor that come from simple God-fearing Jews, we merit the level of 'yechidah', as one merits through actual self-sacrifice for sanctification of the Name. Through these sufferings we atone for the entire world, and the generation's sins transform to merits, and many advocates arise for all Israel's sages, to vindicate through their merit all of Israel.

*But here Rav Kook sees an important role of the breaching of boundaries which have held the Jewish people back in the past, provided these are undertaken for the sake of Heaven.*

29. ... ולמעשה הדבר תלוי בכוונת הרוצים לחדש מנהג זה של חגיגת הבת מצוה, אם הם מתכוונים לשם מצוה או חלילה לשם חיקוי המינים.

אמנם לא נעלם ממני, שיש בין היראים אוסרים ומחמירים, שאינם שמים לב בשאלות של מנהגים דתיים לשיקולים הגיוניים, ואף אינם נותנים דעתם לבידורים הלכותיים, אלא דנים עליהן עפ"י רגשות הלב בלבד. והלב היהודי הדבק במסורת הורים ומורים, נרתע מכל שינוי שהוא בנוהג הדתי ... אולם אין להם לשכוח כי גם המצדדים בהיתר של מנהג חדש זה של חגיגת בת מצוה, לבס דופק בחרדה לחיזוק החינוך הדתי של בנות ישראל, שבנסיבות של החיים בדור הזה הן זקוקות ביותר לחיסון רוחני ולעידוד מוסרי בהגיען לגיל המצוה.

שו"ת שרידי אש חלק ב סימן לט (בדפוס ישן - ג'צג)

*The Seridei Eish, in his landmark teshuva on Bat Mitzva, rules that, ultimately, the onus is upon those (men or women) seeking to change a minhag to show that their motivation is positive and driven by kavod Shamayim and not by secular politicized ideas, such as egalitarianism, feminism and the application of 'equal rights' to ritual issues.*

• Clearly, different people have differing motivations and agendas. Individuals may themselves have mixed motivations. How are we to assess these? Are we consulting sufficiently with people to discuss and assess their motivations? And when they declare these surely we should default to trusting and believing them rather than assuming that they are lying or confused.

30. The discussion regarding women's tefilla groups has regrettably focused excessively on technical issues and legalities. It has been framed by limited halakhic queries such as: may the participants forgo tefilla be-tzibbur to attend these groups? May menstruant women touch sifrei Torah? Undoubtedly such technical perspectives and narrow questions are necessary to ensure our compliance with all minutiae of halakha. Torah, however, consists not only of halakhic details, but also of halakhic values. Unfortunately the latter have been neglected in the discussion concerning women's tefilla groups. When halakha is fragmented and truncated in such a fashion, it can be neither interpreted nor implemented correctly. The approach of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l differed. The Rav's consistent opposition to women's tefilla groups was dictated by halakhic values, not halakhic details.

**"Halakhic Values and Halakhic Decisions: Rav Soloveitchik's Pesak Regarding Women's Prayer Groups"** Rav Meyer Twersky Tradition, 32:3 Spring 1998 - see [http://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2003/rtwe\\_wtg.html#fn10](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2003/rtwe_wtg.html#fn10)



31. In sum, halakha is a two-tiered system consisting of concrete, particularized commandments governing our actions as well as abstract, general imperatives governing the matrix of our actions. Some abstract imperatives focus exclusively on the elan of a specific *mitsva*, e.g., the commandment *Shabbaton* ensures the spiritual character of *Shabbat*. Others are all-encompassing, establishing universal values and standards of conduct; e.g. *kedoshim te-hiyu*. The Torah legislates not only actions, but also *de'ot* (ethical-moral-religious-intellectual dispositions). It prescribes ritual but also establishes boundaries for the concomitant religious experience.

ibid

32. **שאלה** - האם מותר לנשים לרקוד עם ספר תורה בשמחת תורה?  
**תשובה** - בכל הדורות דבר זה לא היה קיים, ומי שמצווה בלימוד תורה הוא זה שגם שמח בשמחתה בשמחת תורה, כל הרצונות האלו נובעים מרצון לטשטש את השוני החיובי והתפקידים השונים שיש לנשים וגברים, ומחשבה מוטעית להשיג שוויון מדומה. ההבדלים הם מהותיים, התפקידים שונים תוך כבוד והערכה הדדית, וכל שוויון מעין זה יביא רק לאיבוד היחודיות ולחוסר כבוד. לכן בודאי שאין לעשות כך.

רב דוב ליאור, ריקוד נשים עם ספר תורה (2002)<sup>15</sup>

*Rav Dov Lior ruled that women's hakafot with a Sefer are prohibited. His reasoning is: (i) this was never the custom and a new custom should not now be innovated; (ii) women are not commanded in the mitzva of learning Torah in the same way as men and therefore should not be celebrating that connection in the same way; (iii) the push for this innovation is coming from feminist and egalitarian agendas to blur distinctions between men and women. From a Torah perspective, these distinctions are essential and attempts to undermine them are deeply destructive to Judaism.*

33. והנה ראשית צריך לדעת כי מעיקרי האמונה הטהורה שלנו שכל התורה בין שבכתב בין שבעל פה ניתנה מהקב"ה בעצמו בהר סיני ע"י משה רבנו ע"ה ואי אפשר לשנות אפילו קוץ אחד לא להקל ולא להחמיר. .... וממילא זה שהתורה פטרה ממצות עשה שהזמן גרמה הוא מן התורה וגם רבנן לא חייבו כי לא ראו בזה שום צורך לחייבן .... ואנו מחוייבין להאמין שאיכא טעמים גדולים לקב"ה נותן התורה איכא גם טעמים גלויים לכל. כי סתם נשים בעולם אינן עשירות ועליהן מוטל גידול הילדים והילדות שהיא מלאכה היותר חשובה להשי"ת ולהתורה. וכן ברא השי"ת בטבע כל מין ומין דמבעלי חיים שהנקבות יגדלו את הולדות ואף את מין האדם לא הוציא מן הכלל בזה. שגם טבע הנשים מסוגל יותר לגידול הילדים שמצד זה הקל עליהן שלא לחייבן בלמוד התורה ובמצות עשה שהזמן גרמה. ....

שלכן אף אם ישתנה סדור החיים בעולם גם לכל הנשים ולעשירות בכל הזמנים ואף כשאפשר למסור הגידול לאיזה אינשי ונשי כבמדינתנו לא נשתנה דין התורה ואף לא דין דרבנן, ולא תועיל שום מלחמה כי אין שום כח לשנות אפילו בהסכם כל העולם כולו שום דבר. והנשים שמתעקשות ורוצות ללחום ולשנות הן בחשיבות כופרות בתורה! ....

ושנית צריך לדעת כי אין זה בשביל שנשים פחותות במדרגת הקדושה מאנשים דלענין הקדושה שוות לאנשים .... והרבה מהנשים שהיו נביאות ויש להן כל דיני נביא שבאנשים, ובהרבה דברים נשתבחו בין בקראי בין בדברי חז"ל עוד יותר מלאנשים, וליכא שום זלזול בכבודן ובכל דבר בזה שנפטר מלמוד התורה וממצות שהזמן ג' וליכא כלל שום סבה להתרעם כלל, וזה יש לכתר"ה להסביר בכל פעם ופעם ולהיות תקיף וחזק בדעתו שהוא כדיני התורה למחות באלו הנשי שאחר כל זה יעמדו בדעתן האולת והעקושה שלא לשנות שום דבר ממנהגי ישראל הקדושים.

שו"ת אגרות משה אורח חיים חלק ד סימן מט

*In this 1976 teshuva, Rav Moshe Feinstein firmly rejects feminist egalitarian agendas as pushing against the natural essential roles of men and women and also rejecting the unchanging Torah from God. This teshuva does NOT address the specific issue of women's hakafot.*

- Many commentators who are open in principle to broader roles for women in public and synagogue life nevertheless caution that the Torah approach on these issues should be evolutionary and not revolutionary and that we should err on the side of conservatism when making sweeping changes to minhag<sup>16</sup>.

## D] CONCLUSIONS?

- This is a relatively halachically simple, but hashkafically complex issue. It is also emotive and divisive.
- The main halachic issue is that of kavod haTorah. Given that what we do now with the Sifrei Torah on Simchat Torah is problematic, should we extend that problem to a whole new arena of dancing for women?

15. <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/ask/379>

16. See in particular R. Chaim Navon in Chapter 4 of his *Gesher Bnot Ya'akov*, a book dedicated to a thoughtful analysis of the changing roles of women in Orthodox society. (An earlier version of that essay is available at <https://bmj.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/22.4.Navon.pdf>) R. Navon argues for a conservative approach to societal change, based in part on the thinking of Edmund Burk following the French Revolution. He brings a number of examples of evolutionary change which, over time, have made a significant impact on minhag Yisrael without revolutionary upheaval, such as women's greater involvement at funerals and the changes in women's Torah education over the last 150 years. I would add to these the significant changes in the place of Charedi women in the workplace, especially in Israel.

• On the other hand, to raise this as an issue only for women's hakafot and not for the men seems hypocritical and unreasonable. Could this be an opportunity to 'reign in' the men's dancing and introduce something more appropriate for both men and women? There could be real resistance to this from men who would see it as undermining current minhag.

• Major hashkafic issues/values involved here include:

#### FOR HAKAFOT

- the importance of including and connecting women to Torah and community life - 'nachat ruach lenashim'.
- the importance of avoiding the feeling of 'itzavon gadol' at exclusion from significant religious ceremonies.
- the dangers of constantly refusing changes and the real possibility that some women will ultimately feel alienated and leave the Orthodox community or push for changes which really do present significant halachic challenges (such as egalitarian/partnership services).

#### AGAINST HAKAFOT

- the perceived blurring of lines with non-Orthodox movements, especially through changes to the synagogue service.
- the concern that this represents a slippery slope which will lead to more problematic halachic changes.
- the concern that the request for innovation is rooted in a liberal, egalitarian, rights-based approach emerging from a secular perspective which is antithetical to Torah.

#### GENERAL

- the extent to which this issue causes machloket in the community
- the extent to which this issue causes the erosion of the authority of the Rav of the community<sup>17</sup>.

• Some women also have strong feelings<sup>18</sup> about Simchat Torah based on their past experiences. These include:

- a sense that the celebration of Simchat Torah is a 'men's club' from which women feel sidelined. This is increased by the excessive consumption of alcohol in some communities.
- while lengthy hakafot take place the women can either stand and watch, talk to their friends or stay at home. Few people find these to be religiously uplifting<sup>19</sup>.
- a sense that men are controlling women's access to Torah, at the same time as failing to recognize the real changes that woman have made over the last decades in deepening their knowledge of and connection to Torah learning.

• For two interesting personal accounts of these issues, see:

- Sarah Rudolph - Simchas Torah and Women, Torah Musings (2017)<sup>20</sup>
- Batya Gold (a pseudonym) - Dancing on the Edge, Jewish Action (1999)<sup>21</sup>

34. ...Holding the scroll, that, to my mind, is secondary. The real point is that we have an equal right to rejoice in our sacred heritage. Nobody is making us chat; ultimately, no one is stopping us from dancing. If it's a men's holiday, that is because we let it be....On Simchat Torah, I dance for the concept of Torah, not the object. I dance for myself and my love of Torah study. I dance for the joy of the completed cycle of reading, and I dance for the joy of beginning all over again. I dance because I will shortly have tears in my eyes, like I do every year, as I listen to the account of Moses' death in the last few verses of the Torah. I dance because I will shortly be awed, as I am every year, when we begin again and read, "And it was evening, and it was morning, one day." The very beginning of everything; something, where there had been nothing.

Sarah Rudolph, 'Simchat Torah Doesn't Have to be a Men's Holiday'

• In practice, all of these factors must be weighed judicially by the community and its rabbinic and lay leadership. The correct call will differ from community to community and must take account of the nature of the community<sup>22</sup>.

17. Of course the ultimate halachic/hashkafic decision must be that of the Rav. On the other hand, the community chooses (and can unchoose!) the Rav.

18. These are sentiments that I have heard from women.

19. Some communities which do not have women's hakafot have introduced a special shiur for women during the men's hakafot. This is a positive innovation although will not be appreciated by some nor acceptable to others.

20. <https://www.torahmusings.com/2017/10/simchas-torah-women/>. Her earlier pieces can be found at <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/2015/10/02/on-simchat-torah-get-up-and-dance-with-me/> and <https://www.kveller.com/simchat-torah-doesnt-have-to-be-a-mens-holiday/>

21. <https://jewishaction.com/opinion/dancing-edge/>

22. For an interesting case-study, see <https://www.alonshvut.org.il/objDoc.asp?PID=623590&OID=623608>. This is a full account by the Rav of Alon Shevut, R. Zev Weitman - a senior and respected posek and also Rav of Tenuva - of the robust debate within Alon Shevut on this issue in 2017. The community was vocally divided on the issue, with groups of men and women strongly for and against. (The community did not divide by gender on this and there were many women who were strongly opposed and men who were in favor. There was a more noticeable split Israeli vs Chutznik, with more Israelis taking a conservative position against innovation. But there were notable exceptions to this too.) As R. Weitman outlines in his essay, a significant group of women wanted women's hakafot with a Sefer Torah in the shul building. R. Yosef Zvi Rimon, Rav of the 'New Shul' (but not of the Yishuv) was opposed to this but was prepared to allow two women's hakafot at an outside location. R. Weitman was elected as Rav of Alon Shevut and was asked about this during the election process. He was prepared to allow, and even encourage, women's hakafot and eventually a compromise was reached whereby women's hakafot take place without a Sefer Torah in the Ezrat Nashim of the shul and separately for two hakafot with a Sefer Torah in the Social Hall under the shul which is technically owned by the Yishuv. Now, in Alon Shevut there is a roughly equal 3-way split of women during hakafot - 1/3 in the main shul watching the men, 1/3 in the Ezrat Nashim for women's dancing without a Sefer, and 1/3 in the Social Hall for women's dancing with a Sefer. A further question came up relating to the request by a smaller group of women for women's leynung on Simchat Torah. Rav Rimon was firmly opposed to this. Rav Weitman explains in his essay why he does NOT oppose this in principle although, in deference to Rav Rimon and other Rabbanim of the community, women leynung does not take place in the shul building.