Growing up in the 1960s, I would have found the notion of a woman rabbi, a woman Israeli Supreme Court judge, or an Orthodox synagogue where women read the Torah from their side of the *m’chitzah* impossible dreams; even ridiculous scenarios. I never once saw a woman ascend the bimah of my Reform temple except to light the Friday night candles; even the mothers of the bat mitzvah girls sat in the pews while the fathers proudly had the *aliyah*.

In 1968, when I was thirteen years old, all the girls in my Sunday School were routinely given a choice by their parents: Bat Mitzvah or Sweet Sixteen? I was the only girl of the class who chose to have a bat mitzvah. I will never forget the moment I ascended the bimah, read my portion, and opened my speech. I pushed the prepared text aside—the text that had been written for me by my rabbi—and began to speak extemporaneously. I explained how meaningful and important this day was for me, and then I announced that I wanted to become a rabbi. My family gasped. The cantor broke into tears. And then, the rabbi fell off his chair. When he regained his composure, he announced into the microphone on his side of the bimah, “No, no, of course she means she want to be a *rebbezin*.” “But no,” I said into the microphone on my side of the bimah, “let my husband be the *rebbezin*, I’m going to be the rabbi.”

Lots of laughter. A cute story and true. But I didn’t know at all what it would mean to break a glass ceiling or to do something that had not been done. I was only thirteen and I wanted to
change the world, but it was highly personal, totally individual. I never thought that women becoming rabbis would shake the very foundation of Judaism; question every assumption of Jewish life, which was based on patriarchal power; or challenge what it meant to be a Jewish woman. I didn’t realize that I was in the middle of a quiet revolution, one that would not remain quiet but would eventually echo into the pages of the prayer book, the boardrooms of major Jewish organizations, the seminaries, the yeshivahs, and the Israeli government within the next generation. In the years following my bat mitzvah, Sally Priesand and the first generation of female rabbis would be ordained, women would become cantors and synagogue presidents, liturgy would change to not only include the Matriarchs but eventually the neutral Hebrew of Marcia Falk and the feminine presence of the Shechinah. We’d start singing songs of Miriam in summer camp, learn Talmud from Orthodox women, introduce the notion of female spirituality, make feminine tallitot, and redefine sexual politics. We would feel empowered to create midrashim with biblical women named and unnamed, to take on the traditional meaning of the mikveh and reappropriate it to a feminist agenda, to invoke the name of the Goddess. We would reclaim and recast scores of different rituals while questioning the hierarchical nature of those rituals and of the community that “owned” them. We would challenge the Israeli public to rethink the lines between “religious” and “secular,” and we would bring the issues of child care, wife abuse, violence against Jewish women, and power imbalances in the Jewish organizational world to the fore.

We have witnessed, in my opinion, the largest scale change in Judaism since emancipation in the 1800s allowed Jews to leave the ghetto walls. I daresay that no Jew today, even the most isolated or right-wing religious one, is free from the influence of feminism, even if just to have to justify the traditional position. Whereas in the last generation the feminist position was marginal and threatening, today the traditional man or woman may feel they are a dying species. They have to explain why the women in their synagogue do not participate ritually or publicly, why there are no women’s voices at the Torah study they frequent, and why their view assumes heterosexuality or male privilege. That Jews of every denomination are even in dialogue with these questions proves that the questions have entered mainstream Jewish consciousness.
and have become part and parcel of the wider view of the community. The fact that young rabbis no longer struggle with finding women’s voices in the text or in the classroom, but instead have set upon the task of redefining the entire rabbinate itself as a result of sensitivity around gender, proves just how wide and how deep the conversation has become.

The “Jew” we had grown accustomed to identifying as the man with long side curls and a fur hat has morphed into the woman with a pink tallit. And it will continue to morph into the androgynous or gender queer or trans Jew impossible to define.

But it has not been easy, and there has been—and will continue to be—suspicion, fear, and confrontation. A shift in power structure and in consciousness always brings with it the anxiety that we may have been wrong all along, that we may still be wrong, or that our places in the world, once safe and secure, are now tenuous. Nowhere is this clearer perhaps than in the liberal synagogue, with its new emphasis and interest in “the flight of men.” Now that women have redefined themselves and their place in Judaism, men are faced with the real and difficult task of redefining themselves as Jews. Our God concepts changed, and with them, our concepts of ourselves as Jews. We used a different language to describe the Divine; it came forth with birth and moon and mothering imagery, and thus we began to wonder about what “made in the Divine Image” looked like. We began to write theology; we corrected the patriarchy of traditional Jewish thought and created our own brand that took into account not only feminist but also ecological and political concerns. We gained a new theological vocabulary but in doing so we lost God the Father and left some of our congregants adrift. Feminists began the conversation among ourselves; women qua women. But there is no doubt that men are now opening up a whole new conversation among themselves as to what being a Jewish man might be in the twenty-first century.

With the ordination of openly gay and lesbian and more recently transgender rabbis, all our assumptions about gender, sexuality, and religion were called into question. We thought it was just about women! Rabbi Yitz Greenberg once remarked, “It used to be that you would be born an Orthodox man in Brooklyn, and you would die an Orthodox man in Brooklyn. Today you can be born an Orthodox man in Brooklyn but die a Reform woman in Paris.” In the old days of feminism, we thought men were men,
women were women, and we just needed equality between the two. We thought in binary. We thought in opposition. We thought feminism was about women’s rights, women celebrating being women, biology as spiritual destiny, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. It certainly stretched my father’s envelope of comfort to have to get his own fork when he sat down to dinner. It stretched my university’s envelope of comfort to offer Women’s Studies as a respected major. It stretched my rabbi’s envelope to see women do more than light Shabbat candles on “his” bimah. But that was then, this is now. My own envelope has been stretched very far by a new generation of thinkers, and new words have entered my vocabulary: grrls, transgender, intersex, transitioning, gender queer. I’ve written four books on feminism and Judaism, and I certainly thought I knew what the issues of gender and Judaism were. But a new generation of thinkers has challenged us that feminism by definition widens the conversation about gender altogether. What is a gender? What does being “feminine” or “masculine” mean? Does our biological sex or the genitalia we were born with define us?

We thought we were ready, that “some of our congregants are gay,” that the male couple holding hands on the bimah celebrating their *aufruf* would pass the ritual committee, that the boy dressed as a girl in our confirmation class was “a quirky kid” but we could handle it, that the men in our congregations were not coming just because they were busy. It may surprise and discomfort some of us, but we know there is no turning back to the days when, as Archie Bunker sang, “girls were girls and men were men.”

All this was happening in North America while Jewish feminists were just catching up in Israel. Their battles and concerns are unique; their changes are vast, foundational, and still controversial. Gender headways in Israel are changing the whole landscape of what it means to be a Jew in the Jewish homeland. From the kindergarten to the Knesset, the future history of Israel is often provoked by these thinkers in a profound way that no one quite expected.

This special issue of the *CCAR Journal* is an example of the redefining process that began with feminism but continues far beyond it. It began as a symposium/symposium issue about Women in Judaism. But it quickly became an issue about the deepest questions of self-identity, sexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality, transexuality, post-modern sexuality, Jewish spirituality intersecting with sexuality, biology, *Shechinah*, and gender-separated buses in Israel.
This issue of the *Journal* is a conversation with gender. Beginning with what feminism has taught us, Jodie Gordon, soon to be ordained, examines the new generation of rabbis, many of whom have “been there, done that.” Geela Rayzel Raphael reinvigorates the discussion of a feminist theology including a real relationship with *Shechinah*. Carole Balin takes us back to gender-egalitarian confirmation and makes us wonder about bat mitzvah. The conversation continues around gender issues in text as Marcia Beck and Audrey Pollack introduce us to a feminist model of Talmud study, Laurie Green deconstructs feminist midrash, Leah Berkowitz and I struggle with a feminist approach to the very male-centered act of *b’rit milah*, and Rachel Adler helps us create a feminist methodology of healing through the poems of Zelda.

But what about men? Have they been lost in this conversation? Doug Barden tackles the supposed “death” of Brotherhoods, Shawn Zevit writes of men’s spirituality, and Peter Schaktman questions our perceived unshakable commitment to egalitarianism when it is outside our own comfort zone.

We then take on the question of binary definitions of gender and sexuality. Male and female were they created? Margaret Wenig makes a case for a broader understanding of that foundational text. Kate Levy speaks from a mother’s heart about her trans child. Jane Litman offers us her study on the Jewish children of gay and lesbian parents, and Jaimee and Helayne Shalhevet round out the section with a piece on gay and lesbian wedding ceremonies.

Lest we think what happens in North America happens everywhere, in the section on Israel, Anat Hoffman and Dalia Marx bring us up to date on the unfolding and serious gender issues facing Israeli society today.

I was surprised and thrilled with the depth of analysis, and to be frank, sometimes shocked at the pain, love, fear, excitement, hesitation, and honesty that came forth from the essays. There is a rich and diverse panoply of voices in this issue of the *Journal*, both from within our own movement and from other movements, from rabbis and from laypeople. It was frightening and enlivening to edit this issue. It made me think and question and feel and search. I hope it does the same for you. I am grateful to all those who opened up their vulnerable hearts and deep intellects to write, and would like to thank Susan Laemmle and Hara Person for the trust and honor placed in me by choosing me as guest editor.
As black civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer said, “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.” We knew that then, we know that now. Feminism was a key that opened a wide, wide door. Now that it is open, there is no way to close it again. We all are blessed and challenged to be in the generation of those Jews who, in the name of a Judaism that will survive through the ages, address the gaps that opening may create.