



Rabbi Mayer Twersky

May Orthodox Rabbis Permit Women to Don *Tefillin* [1]?

I

The Ruling of the Ramo and Modern Reaction

ואם הנשים רוצין להחמיר על עצמן מוחין בידן
and if the women wish to act stringently [and don *tefillin*] we rebuke them
(Ramo, *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 38:3)

Recently, some rabbis have publicized and implemented their view that women wishing to don *tefillin* should be accommodated, contra Ramo's ruling. A firestorm of controversy has ensued. But seemingly there is ample justification for their position.

The argument runs as follows. What, in effect, have these rabbis done? To best serve their students/congregants they have, simply, sensitively aligned themselves with the Rambam, et al, whose view, contra Ramo, allows women to don *tefillin*. Surely, the view of Rambam, et al is valid.

The nominal argument continues. Times have unquestionably changed. We do not live in sixteenth century Krakow, eighteenth century Vilna, or even fin-de-siecle Radin. In today's world, women wishing to don *tefillin* should be accommodated.

II

Modern Mistakes

The beguilingly simple argument/*psak* outlined above is plagued by, at least, three egregious errors.

Error number one: the unequivocal ruling of the Ramo, subsequently silently endorsed by, inter alia, the Magen Avraham, Taz, Gaon of Vilna, Ba'al HaTanya, Aruch Hashulchan and Mishna Berurah, rejects the position of Rambam et al, and has stood unchallenged for over five hundred years. Moreover, Ramo's ruling has been accepted in Sephardic circles as well [2]. Overturning five hundred plus years of precedent and overwhelming consensus is anything but simple. Only the most eminent *ba'alei hora'ah* could even possibly entertain the notion. For anyone of lesser stature to tamper with five hundred plus years of tradition represents the height of brazenness and goes well beyond the pale of Orthodox Judaism.

The person of lesser or no *halachic* stature may feel that he has a crucially important perspective on the human dimension of the women and *tefillin* issue. Even if he were to be correct in his assessment, however, having perspective in no way compensates for his lack of Torah knowledge and qualification in *psak*. Instead of *psakening* the layman should share that perspective with the most eminent *ba'alei hora'ah*.

The rabbi who is not a *ba'al hora'ah* may nevertheless feel that within his school or shul the question of women and *tefillin* is his call. Even according to his proprietary premise he is profoundly wrong. It may be his school or shul, but it is the *Rebono Shel Olam's* Torah. (This point is elaborated in Section VII below.)

Error number two: even if the five hundred year consensus on the issue of women and *tefillin* had not existed, the recent "*psak*" would still be a perversion of *Halachah* and *halachic* process.

Difference of opinion in the *Rishonim* or *Shulchan Aruch* does not create a *halachic* smorgasbord from which everyone is free to make his own selection. At a culinary smorgasbord or in a commercial venue such as a clothing store every guest/consumer is entitled to have, and act upon, his preference. He can choose what he likes and select what suits himself/his charges best. But that *modus operandi* has no place in *Halachah* and *psak Halachah*. One is not allowed, much less entitled, to opine that, "I think the view of Rambam and Rashba suits me/my charges best."

ולא יאמר האדם אפסוק כמי שארצה בדבר שיש בו מחלוקת ואם עושה כן הרי זה דין שקר אלא אם הוא חכם גדול ויודע להכריע בראיות הרשות בידן

a person may not say regarding an issue where there is difference of opinion "I will decide the *Halachah* as I wish", and if he did so, the ruling is false. But if he is a great sage and capable of deciding the *Halachah* based upon proofs it is his prerogative [to do so]

(Ramo, *Choshen Mishpat* 25:2) [3]

Psak Halachah is rendered by *chachomim* who are *ba'alei hora'ah* based upon canons of *psak*, not by anyone else, regardless of vocation or title, and not by engaging in crass religious consumerism.

Error number three: the recent "*psak*" reflects myopic perception. What, in the year 5774, is the core issue regarding women and *tefillin*? Is it "technical", yes *guf naki* or no *guf naki*? Or perhaps it is educational, accommodating sincere youth or rebuffing them? Alas, if it were only so simple.

In modern times women did not begin donning *tefillin* to emulate Michal *bas* Shaul, be devout Maimonideans or invoke *shem Hashem* upon themselves. Women donned *tefillin* because men do so. Within the secular modern mindset adopted by Reform and Conservative wherein equality = uniformity women who don *tefillin* thereby attain a measure of equality with men [4]. And thus the defining issue is axiological: can

the secular value of egalitarianism be grafted onto *Halachah*?

The answer is obvious. Egalitarianism rejects a vital, essential, divinely ordained dimension of *Halachah*. *Halachah* does not discriminate against men or women. Most assuredly, however, it distinguishes between the genders. A genuine commitment to authentic *Halachah* per force entails rejecting the socially dominant, false philosophy of egalitarianism.

When individuals, regardless of vocation or title, grant license to women to don *tefillin*, *nolens volens*, they validate the insidiousness of egalitarianism.

We would do well to hear the voice of Rav Soloveitchik speaking to us across the generations regarding the obligation to staunchly resist false, socially/religiously dominant philosophies which assail Torah and its values.

In my opinion the *Halachic* dictum, *bishe'ath gezerath ha-malchuth 'afillu mitzvah kallah kegon le-shinuye 'arketha de-mesana, yehareg ve'al ya'avor* [at a time of religious persecution through governmental decree, even for a minor custom, such as one involving a shoelace, let one suffer death sooner than transgress it] (*Sanhedrin* 74b), requiring of us a heroic stand in times of adversity, applies not only to political and religious persecution originated by some pagan ruler, but also to situations in which a small number of God-fearing and Torah-loyal people is confronted with a hostile attitude on the part of the majority dominated by a false philosophy. [5]

A word of elaboration is in order. The issue is not what motivated two particular highschoolers to request permission to don *tefillin* in school. Their personal motives could be innocent, pure, and noble; I have no reason to think otherwise. The issue is the substance of their request - i.e., what the practice of women donning *tefillin* in 5774 represents.

This point can be more easily grasped by considering the following historically fictional scenario. The setting is nineteenth century Germany. Two sincere, innocent highschoolers regularly attend Reform Shabbos services. Not knowing any better, they view the playing of an organ as normative *halachic* behavior. What's more they are very moved by the musical accompaniment. On weekdays they begin davening at home to the accompaniment of an organ. This prolongs their *tefillah*. Nonetheless they happily cut back on much needed sleep to arise early because they feel that this mode of *tefillah* enhances their personal *avodas Hashem*. Eventually, in all innocence, they approach the principal of the local Orthodox day school and request permission to softly play the organ in the *ezras nashim* during davening.

How should the principal respond? Should he be "sensitive", mindful of their *mesiras nefesh*, and create space for their expression of their personal *avodas Hashem*?

Once again the answer is obvious. If the principal makes space for the organ, he does not respect their personal *avodas Hashem* or reward their *mesiras nefesh*. He grievously misleads; he egregiously reinforces reform behavior and values with tragically predictable consequences.

Correcting the students' home behavior may not fall within the principal's purview but he certainly cannot countenance Reform values and practices within school. He should commend their sincerity and commitment to *tefillah*. But he also should sensitively yet clearly explain why accompaniment of an organ has no place in authentic *tefillah*. His mandate is to educate. He rewards their *mesiras nefesh* by inspiring and encouraging genuine, basic *shemiras hamitzvos* - *Shabbos, kashrus, tznius*, etc., not by acquiescing to anti-*halachic* behavior. He respects their personal *avodas Hashem* by teaching them authentic, beautiful *avodas hashem*, according to the *Shulchan Aruch*.

All this is abundantly and indisputably clear. Today's contemporary analogue, women donning *tefillin*, is equally clear.

III

Truth and Accommodation

In the first section of this essay we mentioned a commonly asked question, surely it is preferable to march in step with the times and accommodate women on issues such as *tefillin* rather than risk losing them? Actually, the preceding remarks have already, in part, implicitly addressed this question. Due to its seminal importance, however, let us be explicit and more elaborate.

Once again the sagacious, authoritative voice of Rav Soloveitchik continues to speak to us.

I know beforehand the reaction to my letter on the part of our apostles of religious "modernism" and "utilitarianism". They will certainly say that since the great majority of the recently constructed synagogues have abandoned separate seating, we must not be out of step with the masses. This type of reasoning could well be employed with regard to other religious precepts, such as the observance of the Sabbath, or the dietary laws. However, we must remember that an ethical or Halachic principle decreed by God is not rendered void by the fact that the people refuse to abide by it. Its cogency and veracity are perennial and independent of compliance on the part of the multitudes. If the ethical norm, *Thou shalt not kill* (Exodus 20:13), has not lost its validity during the days of extermination camps and gas chambers, when millions of people were engaged in ruthless murder, but on the contrary, has been impregnated with deeper meaning and significance, then every Halachic maxim assumes greater importance in times of widespread disregard and unconcern. The greater the difficulty, the more biting the ridicule and sarcasm, and the more numerous the opponent - then the holier is the principle, and the more sacred is our duty to defend it. [6]

The Rav was confronting the "Christianization of the synagogue"; today's *morei hora'ah* confront the egalitarianization of Torah. The *halachic* directive, which the Rav so powerfully articulated, remains the same.

The "women's" issues which in certain circles fuel much of the opposition to *Halachah* today had already begun percolating in Rav Soloveitchik's lifetime. The Rav sensitively and unapologetically addressed himself to the surface issues as well as their underlying etiology.

(W)e must not yield -- I mean emotionally, it is very important -- we must not feel inferior, experience or develop an inferiority complex, and because of that complex yield to the charm -- usually it is a transient and passing charm -- of modern political and ideological *sevoros* (logic). I say not only not to compromise -- certainly not to compromise -- but not to yield emotionally, not to feel inferior, not to experience an inferiority complex. The thought should never occur that it is important to cooperate just a little bit with the modern trend or with the secular, modern philosophy. In my opinion, *Yahadus*

(Judaism) does not have to apologize either to the modern woman or to the modern representatives of religious subjectivism. There is no need for apology -- we should have pride in our *mesorah*, in our heritage. And of course, certainly it goes without saying one must not try to compromise with these cultural trends, and one must not try to gear the *halachic* norm to the transient way of a neurotic society, which is what our society is. [7]

In forming political coalitions or clinching business deals, negotiation, accommodation, and concession are the watchwords. They play, however, no legitimate role in determining truth. One ascertains truth through honest, rigorous, erudite inquiry - not by negotiating, accommodating, or conceding. What holds true for truth in general holds true for *halachic* truth (=psak) in particular. Of course, *psak Halachah* is always an exercise in applying *Halachah* to real life situations. As such, a fully nuanced, sensitive understanding of the prevailing socio-political, religious situation forms an integral part of the question. But the answer - *psak* - is neither conciliatory or non-conciliatory. These utilitarian categories are entirely misplaced when speaking of *Halachah* and *psak Halachah*. The *psak* represents what *Halachah*, truthfully and unapologetically, directs for the situation at hand.

IV

Ein Kol Chadash Tachas Hashemesh

The argument that contemporary *morei hora'ah* should march in step with the times and make concessions to prevent assimilation is hauntingly familiar.

We similarly state in our program for the revitalization of the Sabbath that the traditional interdiction of riding on the Sabbath for the purpose of attending the synagogue service may, in the discretion of the local rabbi, be modified ... we must learn to adjust our strategy to the realities of our time and place, in keeping with the realistic genius of the great builders of our faith. Thus, our Sages cautioned us, *tafasta m'rubah lo tafasta* - "to overreach is to court failure," when you attempt to grasp a great deal, you will grasp nothing ... In crucial periods, our sages did not hesitate to make special enactments for their own time or for a limited period of time, in order to meet the challenge of new circumstances. [8]

Conservative rabbis who adamantly insisted they were operating within, and according to principles of, *Halachah* promoted these arguments. In their ignorance they misconstrued and misapplied the sources they cited, and distorted *halachic* process and *Halachah*. Today Conservative Jews - *Hashem yeracheim* - are disappearing.

V

Truth Endures, Falsehood Does Not [9]

One final note about the myopic argument for accommodation on issues such as women and *tefillin* is in order.

As already explained, the real, underlying issue is the Torah's religious gender differentiation. Accordingly, any accommodation *volens* accepts and reinforces the inimical premise that avenues and expressions of *avodas Hashem* for men and women must be identical.

Such acceptance is wholly unacceptable. First of all, it distorts Torah. Moreover, such acceptance and accommodation actually alienate women from Torah.

The process of alienation is tragically straightforward and frighteningly quick. As just noted, accommodation validates and reinforces the inimical egalitarian impulse but cannot satisfy it. Brushing aside the Ramo's ruling does not make *Halachah* conform to the egalitarian creed. Seen from the twisted perspective of egalitarianism, women still suffer from discrimination. They are excluded from serving as *shliach tzibbur*, the *halachos* of marriage and divorce are most decidedly unegalitarian, etc. By reinforcing the egalitarian impulse without satisfying it, every accommodation intensifies the demand for further accommodations. But that demand can never be met because Torah and egalitarianism are fundamentally incompatible. And thus accommodationism, ל"ר, inevitably results in alienation and assimilation.

Tragically, this process of assimilation has already partially materialized. Yesterday's women's *tefillah* groups which stemmed from the same egalitarian impulse no longer suffice. Today *tefillin*, "partnership *minyanim*" and women rabbis are sought. And the handwriting on the wall is unmistakable. Tomorrow these stopgap, anti-*halachic* concessions will no longer suffice. The current path leads inexorably to a black hole of complete assimilation, ל"ר [10].

The alternative to aiding and abetting assimilation ל"ר is to assume our spiritual, educational mandate. Our mandate is to teach Torah (including, but obviously not limited to, elucidating the *halachic* process), and engender a profound appreciation for authentic Torah values, thereby guiding men and women alike to genuine *avodas Hashem* and religious experience.

VI

Tefillin and Talmud Torah

Let us digress for a moment. In recent decades whenever people agitate for changing *Halachah* they trumpet the alleged precedent of women and *talmud Torah*. It is vitally important to recognize the wholesale distortion created by that analogy.

The Belzer Rebbe, Chofetz Chaim, Rav Soloveitchik and other *gedolei Yisroel* who advocated *Torah she'b'al peh* instruction for women were not accommodating them or conceding to heretical, egalitarian, societal trends. Women were not agitating for *talmud Torah* opportunities. They were ל"ר happily assimilating. The *gedolim* recognized that our *mesorah* disapproved of optional, theoretical learning being imposed upon women. Our *mesorah* always mandated necessary, practical learning. In the modern era *Torah she'b'al peh* instruction within the guidelines provided by the *gedolim* for women was/is vitally necessary [11].

The issues of *talmud Torah* and *tefillin* for women could not be more different. The *chachmei hamesorah* upheld *Halachah* and combated assimilation by supporting *talmud Torah* for women. Initiatives such as allowing women to don *tefillin* tamper with *Halachah* and fuel assimilation.

VII

Students and Sages

Let us pause for a moment's reflection. We have outlined three egregious errors - the brazenness of brushing aside precedent and consensus, the smorgasbord mentality and approach to *psak*, and myopic perception of *halachic* issues. Each of these errors in its own right is so elementary and so glaring. The confluence of all three within the recent "*psak*" regarding women and *tefillin* is simply mind boggling. How could this possibly come to pass?

The *Shulchan Aruch* addresses our issue head on.

כל חכם שהגיע להוראה ואינו מורה הרי זה מונע תורה וכו'

Any sage who is qualified to issue *halachic* rulings but does not do so - he is withholding Torah
[*Shulchan Aruch* 242:14]

תלמיד שלא הגיע להוראה ומורה הרי זה שוטה רשע וגס רוח ועליו נאמר כי רבים חללים הפילה

A student who is unqualified and renders *halachic* decisions is a delusional, wicked, and arrogant person, and about him it is said, "(s)he has caused many casualties"

[*Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* ibid. 13, quoting Rambam verbatim]

ותלמידים הקטנים הקופצים להורות ולישב בראש להתגדל בפני ע"ה מרבים מחלוקת ומחריבים העולם ומכבין נרה של תורה

And students of small stature who leap forward to issue *halachic* rulings and to assume positions of authority, aggrandizing themselves before the masses cause discord to proliferate, destroy the world and extinguish the lamp of Torah

[Ramo's gloss, also quoting Rambam, ibid.]

Let us try to get a feel for who is a *chacham she'higi'a l'hora'ah*. Rabbi Akiva Eiger (d.1837), the epitome of Torah mastery and majesty, seemed not entirely convinced that he himself qualified [12]. Ultimately, he wrote and published his responsa but only for the consideration of *morei hora'ah*. No *moreh hora'ah*, he insisted, should simply accept his conclusions. In more recent times, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, widely acclaimed as the *posek hador*, felt the need to justify how he could write and publish responsa [13]. His justification, in part: *hi'gi'ah l'hora'ah* is determined relative to one's own generation. In our generation the range of our greatest sages extends over *Shas*, *Rishonim*, *Shulchan Aruch*, and *poskim*. Clearly, the bar for *hora'ah* remains very high.

Let us now turn our attention to the extraordinary, stinging words of censure which the *Shulchan Aruch* reserved for the *talmid shelo hi'gi'ah l'hora'ah* who *psakens*: *shoteh rasha v'gas ruach* (delusional, wicked, and arrogant.) We have generally excised such stinging epithets from our parlance because we tend to soften or sugarcoat the truth. But softening or sugarcoating also leads *rachamana litslan* to erosion. Accordingly, we need to take the *Shulchan Aruch* at its word, and try to retrace the thought process which yields the stinging censure.

Does the educator, rabbi, or layman not realize that he lacks the breadth and depth of knowledge required of a *ba'al hora'ah*? Does he, in a flight of Walter Mittyish imagination, think himself an expert in *Shas*, *Rishonim*, *Shulchan Aruch*, and major responsa? *Halachic* queries are never directed to him qua *ba'al Halachah* because he is not. They come his way only because of the professional position he occupies. Is his hubris so great and grip on reality so tenuous that he fails to recognize this distinction? How can he possibly arrogate the right to render *halachic* judgments, make public pronouncements about what is or is not consonant with *Halachah* and/or override five hundred plus years of *halachic* precedent and consensus?

Everyone intuitively understands and instinctively feels that a doctor who masquerades as a medical authority in an area beyond his expertise is not only dishonest but wicked. He may be very personable, affable, and even sincere in his desire to help. His personal graces and sincerity, however, do not ameliorate the evil of his masquerade. Inevitably and invariably, people will grievously suffer from his misguided medical guidance. Is a *halachic* masquerade any less immoral? Are spiritual fraud and injury of lesser import than medical fraud and injury?

When individuals act presumptuously and issue reckless rulings, the truth of *Yoreh De'ah* 242:13 becomes searingly painful. We are deeply pained by the thought that, as codified by the *Shulchan Aruch*, a fellow Jew is acting as a *shoteh, rasha, v'gas ruach*. We instinctively recoil at that thought. And yet our vulnerability to truth does not diminish its compelling veracity even an iota. The *Shulchan Aruch's* stinging words of censure for the masquerading halachic authority are formulated with razor like precision.

So too *Shulchan Aruch's* assessment of damage done by irresponsible *psak*- *rabim chalalim hipila*, it inflicts many spiritual casualties. Here too the *Shulchan Aruch* speaks with prescience and precision. Non Orthodox behavior is certified Orthodox. Secular, heretical values are accommodated and re-enforced, thereby promoting assimilation, ר"ל. A mockery is made of authentic *halachic* values such as sensitivity when so grossly misapplied. And sincere *mevakshei Hashem* are steered in the wrong direction.

Perhaps the best way to highlight the danger of irresponsible *psak* is this. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* entrusted us with His Torah and its traditions - to study, interpret, and implement. In the hands of humble sages the integrity of Torah is secure. Their thinking and values are molded by a lifetime of immersion in Torah, and vast Torah erudition. Conversely, in the hands of non-experts the integrity of Torah is impossible to maintain. There is no end to the distortions that brazenness, a smorgasbord approach, and myopic perception will cause.

And, tragically, as per Ramo's gloss quoted above, discord proliferates. *Machlokes* inevitably follows irresponsible *psak* because we are not allowed to remain silent. We have an obligation to protest the distortion and protect the integrity of Torah.

VIII

U'vacharta, And You Should Choose

תורת השם תמימה משיבת נפש עדות השם נאמנה מחכימת פתי פקודי השם ישירים משמחי לב מצות השם ברה מאירת ענים יראת השם טהורה
עומדת לעד משפטי השם אמת צדקו יחדו

The Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of Hashem is trustworthy, making the simple one wise; the orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart; the command of Hashem is clear, enlightening the eyes; the fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever; the judgments of Hashem are true, altogether righteous

[*Tehillim* 19:8-10, Artscroll translation]

Acceptance of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Torah does not simply entail practical compliance. Acceptance also reflects firm belief and evinces a reverential attitude. We accept Torah with a sense of awe, joy, privilege and pride because we perceive it for what it is - Hashem's *chochmo*,

perfect, upright, gladdening, enlightening, true, etc. Accordingly, we accept Torah with humility and submissiveness.

This is what acceptance of Torah ought to be. What acceptance of Torah is, however, in today's world in some circles does not correspond.

We are witness to a profoundly disturbing, religiously untenable phenomenon. Consciously or unconsciously, people want to hold fast onto some secular, anti-Torah Western values and, simultaneously, Torah. Their commitment to some anti-Torah values casts Torah, to a degree, in an adversarial role. And thus, consciously or unconsciously, in a futile attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable they push, twist and manipulate *Halachah* to make it more congenial to their opposing Western values. Somehow or other Torah has to be made malleable enough to accommodate their dual loyalties.

ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע וגו' החיים והמות נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה ובחרת בחיים
 Contemplate that I have placed before you today life and good, death and evil, etc. Life and death, I have placed before
 you, blessing and curse, but you should choose life.
 [Devarim 30:15, 19]

To genuinely live a life of Torah and serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, we are called upon to choose blessing (=good) and forsake curse (=evil). Grafting evil onto good is simply not an option. Choosing what's right per force means rejecting what's wrong.

The choices we make define our lives and determine our destiny.

ותן בנו יצר טוב לעבדך באמת וביראה ובאהבה

[1] Rav Schachter *shlit"á* has authoritatively dealt with this question in his recent responsum. This essay, disseminated with his approbation, merely seeks to expound and expand upon some of the relevant, seminal issues in a popular forum.

[2] ע"י ילקוט יוסף שהאר"ך בזה כיד השם הטובה עלינו, ובין היתר ציין לדברי האר"י ז"ל והחיד"א

[3] דברי הרמ"א נאמרו בקשר לפסק ב"ד בד"מ מקום שישנו מושג של שודא, וקו"ח בשאר חלקי התורה

[4] By definition there can be no adequate response to quibblers who dispute incontrovertible facts. Nevertheless, for purpose of illustration, note the following candid, representative, programmatic remarks, "Ultimately our problem stems from the fact that we are viewed in Jewish law and practice as peripheral Jews. The category in which we are generally placed includes women, children, and Canaanite slaves. Members from this category are exempt from all positive commandments which occur within time limits. These commandments would include hearing the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, eating in the *sukkah*, praying with the *lulav*, praying the three daily services, wearing *tallit* and *tefillin*, and saying *Shema*... Moreover, it is both feasible and desirable for the community to begin educating women to take on the positive time-bound *mitzvot* from which they are now excused; in which case, those *mitzvot* would eventually become incumbent upon women." Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There", reprinted in Susannah Heschel, ed. On Being a Jewish Feminist.

[5] "Message to a Rabbinic Convention", reproduced in Baruch Litvin, The Sanctity of the Synagogue, p. 111.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Transcript of a 1975 *shiur* delivered to RIETS rabbinic alumni, available at arikahn.blogspot.com

[8] "A Responsum on the Sabbath", in Mordechai Waxman, ed., Tradition and Change, 1958.

[9] קושטא קאי שקרא לא קאי (שבת ק"ד).

[10] See my article in Tradition Vol. 32 No. 3, Spring 1998 ([posted in 2003 on TorahWeb.org](http://torahweb.org) in its entirety), presenting and explaining Rav Soloveitchik's *psak* opposing women's *tefillah* groups. The following passage is, unfortunately, especially relevant: "These groups are predicated upon the mistaken notion that the experience of *tefillah* is enhanced by assuming active roles and conversely is stunted when such roles are off-limits. And yet women's *tefillah* groups, conducted with even minimal technical allegiance to the particulars of *Halachah*, cannot provide their participants with the same or even equivalent active roles to those that are available to men praying with a quorum. Within such groups it is impossible to recite *devarim she-bi-kdusha* as such, fulfill the *mitsva* of *kerias haTorah*, etc. And thus, according to the mistaken premise of the *tefillah* groups, women's religious life remains muted even within such groups.

The participants in women's *tefillah* groups will, within the present generation, become intellectually and existentially aware of the failure of such groups and the concomitant false yet inevitable conclusion regarding women's standing within Yahadut. We must recognize that the possible ramifications of this falsehood are especially frightening and particularly tragic. Propelled by negative momentum and misguided by erroneous teachings, some women, God forbid, could reject all remaining halakhic constraints in an unrestrained attempt to enhance their (inauthentic) *tefillah* experience in particular and religious experience in general. Needless to say, this development would be especially tragic.

Accordingly, we presently have a grave responsibility to act wisely, and not be drawn into a fool's paradise of religious accommodationism. We must understand and help others to understand that women's *tefillah* groups, sincere intentions notwithstanding, both reflect as well as generate distortions of Torah principles. Instead of forming such groups we must disseminate authentic Torah teachings regarding *tefillah*, thereby fostering genuine, profound religious expression and experience."

[11] See also my article about the Rav in Tradition vol. XXX, no. 4 (reprinted in Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik: Man of *Halachah*, Man of Faith, edited by Rabbi Menachem Genack) and in Jewish Action Vol. 57, No. 4, Summer 1997 ([also posted in 2003 on TorahWeb.org](http://torahweb.org) in its entirety.)

[12] ע' הקדמת בניו לשו"ת רעק"א

[13] ע' הקדמה לאג"מ או"ח ח"א

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