

slope. "I don't agree. However, even if I accept the slippery slope metaphor, I say that we are trying to go up the slope, toward God, toward the heavens, toward spiritual integrity, toward making things more meaningful for those who choose it."

She also addresses fears that Shira Hadasha's version of Orthodox feminism might split the community. "The feminist wave in Orthodoxy *has* split the community. The split is between people who believe feminism is a religious calling and those who think it is dangerous," she says.

"People ask, how can you women cause a split in the community? I say splitting is not new. There's the left and the right, the settler movement and the

haredi. Jews split when Hasidism came about. The Jewish people split all the time. I sometimes make the comparison with Zionism. Zionism also split the Orthodox community. There were those who thought it would challenge and enhance the religious spirit and those who thought, 'How can you take history into your own hands?' The unity of the Jewish people is very important. But I believe we can be a unified people who are very different. We can feel deep solidarity with one another. In fact, we are a divided people, and in Israel this is even more intense than elsewhere."

"One of the beauties of Orthodox Judaism is that it has room for very different 'styles,'" says Naomi Cohen, a teacher of Talmud to women and a founding

member of the Israel Women's Network, as well as Kolech, Religious Women's Forum. "Take synagogues like Lincoln Square on the Upper West Side, Breslov and Messianic Chabad. Though many people object strenuously to one or another of these, they all exist under the same roof and none of them have been read out of the fold."

Daniel Sperber's approval was good enough for Barbara Sofer of Jerusalem. A *Jerusalem Post* columnist and the Israel director of Hadassah's public relations, Sofer sought an Orthodox shul with a complete Shabbat service with a secluded area for women and wanted to be a part of a community where people share her level of observance. In Shira Hadasha, she found an Orthodox shul that met her requirements. "I can live with not everybody agreeing," she says, "as long as I have a strong rabbinic authority telling me it's okay."

Her interest in Shira Hadasha was born after her five children were grown, when she felt the urge to explore her own spiritual needs—a freedom, she says, to "find something for me." The transition wasn't seamless. Sofer was used to what she'd known, taking a seat behind a curtain, never expecting a woman to read from the Torah, accepting that men took charge. The fact that not all women dressed with the same standards of modesty threw her. On any given Shabbat, there are women in sleeveless shirts amid those fit for an inconspicuous stroll through Mea She'arim. But being in this synagogue—she says she goes more often than she ever did to her previous shul—helped her to grow and become more accepting. "When you go from one step of the ladder to the next, you feel a little unsteady," Sofer says, referring to a passage in the Zohar, the most important of Kabbalistic writings. "But I definitely felt like this was a higher rung."

During Visiting Hours

There was something about the aide's voice—
not gentle but comforting
in its very plainness

(like Shaker furniture
or glass milk bottles
on a stoop)

that opened my mother's eyes
to the quickly fading flowers
in my hand—the color

of spots of blood on the sheet
the nurses had somehow missed.
The smell

of anesthetic lingered,
like the scent of my dead father's
aftershave, but the voice was asking

such a simple question (tea
or some juice?) that my mother politely
returned to life and answered.

—Linda Pastan