

WOMEN'S LEAGUE 90TH ANNIVERSARY INSTALLATION SCRIPT

For narrator and three speakers

NARRATOR:

In the beginning, Mathilde created Women's League. United Synagogue was formless and unruly, with the spirit of Solomon Schechter hovering over the churning and chattering deep.

And Mathilde said:

"Let there be a women's auxiliary of the United Synagogue"

And there was a women's auxiliary of the United Synagogue, and Mathilde saw that it was good; and Mathilde separated the women from the United Synagogue. And Mathilde called them The Women's League of the United Synagogue, and there was organization and there was sovereignty, in 1918.

SPEAKER A:

How far we have come in these 90 years! In its ninety years, our members have been witnesses to history: A world war and the Holocaust, Israel's statehood, Canadian sovereignty, mass exoduses of Jews to Israel from Yemen, the Soviet Union, Ethiopia and even Argentina. Our women were active participants in women's suffrage, the war effort, the Civil Rights movement and the feminist revolution.

SPEAKER B:

Once upon a time we were mothers and teachers and nurses and social workers. Now we are mothers and teachers and nurses and social workers and engineers, and doctors and psychologists and college professors.

Once upon a time we cooked, and baked and knitted and crocheted. Now we cook and bake and knit and crochet and run marathons, and argue cases in court, lead services and read Torah.

Once upon a time we were Sophies and Feiges, then Barbaras and Susans. Now we are Talias and Shiras, Autumns and Starlights.

NARRATOR:

We were protectors of tradition **and** agents of change. How did we get to where we are today?

SPEAKER C:

In 1925, Women's League grew from its founding hundred women in 26 sisterhoods to a membership of 230 sisterhoods in 6 branches in the United States and Canada, with 20,000 members.

SPEAKER A:

By 1968, Women's League reached a peak of 200,000 members affiliated with 800 sisterhoods represented in 28 branches.

SPEAKER B:

Although our growth has slowed over the years, our women have become increasingly knowledgeable about Jewish tradition. Since its founding in 1918, our Conservative women have become: rabbis and cantors, Jewish educators and Jewish scholars, executive directors and synagogue presidents. We have moved from the periphery to the center of the action.

NARRATOR:

Over the years we have published a variety of books: *The Three Pillars* by Deborah Melamed, *The Jewish Home Beautiful* by Betty Greenberg and Althea Silverman, a baby book, our enormously popular calendar diary, initiated by Hadassah Nadich in 1959 and of course the ever popular Celebration Series that has sold more than 500 million copies.

With the motto "education is the lifeline of sisterhood" -- over the years Women's League has been at the forefront of innovative educational initiatives:

SPEAKER C:

In 1931 the Women's Institute of Jewish Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary was initiated through the League's Metropolitan Branch in cooperation with Hadassah, the National Council of Jewish Women, Ivriah, the Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations, and Women's League for Palestine.

SPEAKER A:

The *Judaism in the Home* project, introduced by Rose Goldstein in the 1950s, taught women how to promote holiday observance in the home.

SPEAKER B:

The Oneg Sabbath program was designed to teach women about the weekly Torah reading.

SPEAKER C:

In 1993, Kolot BiK'dushah was established, honoring women who read Torah and serve as *shlihot tzibbur* – the three categories of membership now have over 700 members.

SPEAKER A:

Since 2007, the revamped www.WLCJ.org website offers its members a wide variety of educational materials and Women's League resources.

NARRATOR:

These are but a few – but each highlights the Women's League commitment to educating its members. While the central mission always remains the same, the process of education is dynamic and ever-changing.

SPEAKER B:

Women's League has not only been a representative arm of the Conservative movement, but has always been closely linked to the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Beginning in 1934 this connection became formalized with an establishment of an education fund to assist JTS in its work. In 1942 it was renamed Torah Fund. The initial contribution was \$6.11 – the Hebrew equivalent of Torah.

In 1945 the Chai Club encouraged women to increase their gifts to \$18.00. Then, in 1957, the Torah Fund pins were introduced. Among the Women's League Torah Fund projects, the Mathilde Schechter Residence Hall, opened in 1967, and the dedication of the Women's league Seminary Synagogue in 1995 were stunning achievements.

NARRATOR:

Through the years, however, while the mission remained the same, many things have changed. Some things that are now part of the past:

SPEAKER C:

The Committee on Rural Work: women sent out to help Jewish farmers to improve on their Jewish education and to accelerate the process of Americanization.

SPEAKER A:

Women's League buttons and letterheads contained a Jewish mother and child inside of a *magen david*.

SPEAKER B:

The Twilight Stories, Study Circles, and Propaganda Committees

SPEAKER C:

A half year budget report that reads:

Total receipts since June: \$993.33

Total disbursements since June: \$657.61

Balance as of September 17, 1920: Total balance: \$335.72

SPEAKER A:

Outlook magazine sent to paid subscribers, *only*. The policy was changed in 1944 to include a subscription of Outlook as part of per capita dues.

SPEAKER B:

A manual for child-rearing in English and Yiddish

SPEAKER C:

Comments at national board meetings such as: "Too much Jewish content in the programs will result in the loss of interest among members – maybe we should feature studies of other cultures ... like, say ... the Chinese."

SPEAKER A:

Serious discussion that the new phone in the Women's League office should be a pay phone

SPEAKER B:

Women known only by their husband's name

NARRATOR:

What will they be adding to that list, 90 years from now? That is for our granddaughters and great-great granddaughters to write. But as Mathilde and Henrietta and Dora and Goldie and Helen, and their host of heavenly mothers look down from on high – they can smile. “Our daughters have done us proud.”