



WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Women's League Shabbat 2017/5777

P'ri Yadehah - The Fruit of Her Hands

Reading: Bella Abzug

Thirteen-year-old Bella Savitzky insisted on saying Kaddish for her beloved father, Emanuel, an immigrant butcher. The men around her objected on the grounds that this was a male duty and prerogative. As her father had only daughters, she ignored them, praying in the women's section of her family's Orthodox shul each morning before school. Her defiance taught Bella a lifelong lesson about doing what she thought was right. "People may not like it" she said years later, "but no one will stop you."

Bella had already learned Hebrew and the prayers from attending services with her grandfather and from years of Hebrew school. Her religious studies continued through supplementary Hebrew high school and classes at the Jewish Theological Seminary while she attended Hunter College. With fellow adolescent socialists, she hiked, danced, hung out, planned their future lives as kibbutzniks in Palestine, and collected money for the homeland, often orating to passersby at subway stops.

After her first choice, Harvard Law School, rejected her -- as it did all women until 1952 -- she attended Columbia Law School on scholarship. Later, when she married Martin Abzug, he even typed her law school papers because she never learned how -- a tactic used by some educated women to avoid being shunted into secretarial work.

After graduation from law school, Bella quickly found that a pretty red-headed young woman did not get the respect due the legal representative of auto, restaurant, and mill-workers' union locals, her first job. But no one asked her to get coffee when she wore a hat. Large brimmed headgear that distinguished her from clerks and secretaries would be her trademark throughout her subsequent legal, political, and congressional careers.

Later, she worked as a solo law practitioner, even while giving birth to two daughters. She plunged into local Democratic reform politics and five years later her neighborhood along with Chelsea, Little Italy, the Lower East Side and the West Side, sent her, now 50, to Washington for the first of three Congressional terms. She won on the slogan "This woman's place is in the House."

She quickly emerged as a leading national spokeswoman for the political branch of resurgent feminism. She organized a congressional caucus on issues related to women, worked successfully to

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outlaw sex discrimination in credit and mortgages, and supported many bills on feminist causes such as child care, abortion rights, and Social Security eligibility for homemakers. The legal basis for female equality expanded during Bella Abzug's years in Congress thanks to her hard work and the fruit of her hands, *pri yadeba*.

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