



From Mathilde's Mouth to Our Ears

On this Women's League Shabbat, 5778, we are living through a time of tremendous political and social upheaval. Each generation, like the one before, imagines that its challenges are enormous, and even by some pundits are worse than ever.

But listen to the words of our founder, Mathilde Schechter, written in the year 5678, 1918.

"A Time for Jewish Women"

Whilst we women of conservative homes have done our full share in helping them [national organizations of women] whole-heartedly, we have neglected our own work that is calling to us; we have been magnificently disorganized. We wish to serve the cause of Judaism by strengthening the bond of unity among Jewish women, and by learning to appreciate everything fine in Jewish life and literature.

You will probably ask: "is this the time for more work?" and I say there never was a time when the religious and moral influence of women was more sorely needed than at the present day of war and misery and social upheaval. "I lift up my voice unto God, and I cry; I lift up my voice unto God" (Psalm 77). How could the mothers of the world bear the heart-breaking trials without faith? People will turn to religion for comfort in their grief, and for inspiration in seeking a path amidst the hopeless turmoil of things.

The mothers of Israel, having suffered in the fiery furnace throughout the centuries, have evolved beautiful women's prayers for all of a woman's woes. The techinah of our grandmothers, in its genuine tenderness and delicate intimacy, is a great comfort. We possess a wealth of women' literature, awaiting to be rediscovered and to be made accessible to us.

...For our own and for our children's sake, we must educate ourselves with single-hearted devotion, in study-circles and in our homes We ought to study our own history, our ancient literature, and the present day works of Jewish interest, such as those issued by the Jewish Publication Society. Above all, we must familiarize ourselves again with our own Bible.

Is she still speaking today to us?