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\* A C H A T A B O U T T H E W O M E N ' S L E A G U E \*  
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By

SARAH KUSSY

THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S LEAGUE  
of the  
United Synagogue  
3080 Broadway  
New York City

Mrs. Barnett E. Kopelman, President  
Mrs. Leon S. Lang, Program Director



## A CHAT ABOUT THE WOMEN'S LEAGUE

By Sarah Kussey

She asked me a question in all sincerity. Her sisterhood was one of the largest, best organized groups in Greater New York. She was proud of her sisterhood and had a right to be so.

"But why should one be affiliated with the Women's League of the United Synagogue of America?" came the question. "It doesn't help us in our fund-raising projects. Our Rabbi assists us in our educational work whenever we need his support. As for the thirty-five cents per capita tax that we pay for affiliation, we could certainly find better use for the money."

"I wonder," was my reply. "By the way," I asked, as though about to change the subject, "Were you with the Women's League group in the Temple of Religion at the World's Fair the day Fannie Hurst spoke?"

"Yes indeed," was the reply, "I wouldn't have missed it for anything. How did you get her? Our sisterhood tried again and again to book her but found the price prohibitive."

"And did you enjoy the pageant that followed," I asked, "My Country 'Tis."

"Well! I should say so!" came emphatically.

"It was written by one of our own women, you know, Mrs. Silverman of Hartford, Connecticut," I went on, "and was later produced at the Conference on Human Relations at Williamstown, Mass. From all over the country came requests for copies."

"Indeed? Quite a feather in the cap of the Women's League." A book on the table caught her eye.

"Oh, you have the K'tonton Stories," she said, "I heard about them from a friend of mine who bought a copy at Macy's or Wernath's." She took the book in her hand. "Why! Published by the Women's League of the United Synagogue?" she asked in astonishment.

"Of course," I said, "didn't you know that? I have heard it mentioned by a Jewish educator as one of the finest Jewish story books for young children that has ever been published. The author, Mrs. Weilerstein, is one of our own women. Her K'tonton stories have met with such acclaim that the Jewish Publication Society of America has asked her to write for it a book of children's stories in a vein similar to the K'tonton tales. "K'tonton" and other publications of ours have served more than one organization outside of the League." I walked to the bookcase and brought back a few books, "Modern Problems of Jewish Parents," "The Three Pillars," "The Handbook for Jewish Women's Organizations," and briefly described the contents.

"The steady sale of these books testifies to their need. "The Three Pillars" now used in hundreds of homes throughout the land was also written by one of our own women, Deberch Melamed of Elizabeth, N. J. It has been proclaimed by no less an



authority than Dr. Louis Finkelstein of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, as the best book prepared on that subject. Then we have the "Friday Night Stories," Prayer Cards, etc. Wait while I show you some more publications."

I brought to her attention one of our proudest productions, "The Jewish Home Beautiful." She opened it, glimpsed through it, paused and pondered over certain items, then burst forth enthusiastically:

"Oh, I must have this! Songs, decorations, festive dishes, all the many things that make up the Yom Tov spirit in the home. The prayers, the melodies by which each festival is distinguished, everything seems to be here."

"I am glad you like it. The authors, Mrs. Simon Greenberg and Mrs. Morris Silverman did a fine and necessary job in bringing out the aesthetic elements in which Judaism abounds and linking them up with home and family ties."

"Linking them up with home and family ties," my visitor repeated softly, then, after a moment's pause, "I see why Judaism survived."

"Yes," I answered, "that is why we emphasize the religious ceremonies of the home and don't lay our stress on sisterhood and synagogue work. And here is something else to stimulate religious sentiment and observance in the Jewish home." Out came records of Jewish Melodies. While they were being played, one after the other, I mentioned Jewish schools, Homes for the Aged and other Jewish institutions in remote places to which they have proved a godsend.

"Wonderful!" my friend ejaculated. "But where can we get all this material? Why don't we see more of it? Why don't we have it at our meetings to show the members?" She was getting warmed up.

"Why, indeed," I echoed. "Many of our sisterhoods have our literature on display at every meeting, in charge of a local chairman on Women's League activities. This is going on all over the country, women buying literature which no single sisterhood, yours or one twice as large, could afford singly, to print. Only a national body can do that. Then there is the "Outlook", the magazine we issue quarterly, of which Mrs. Israel Davidson is editor-in-chief. It contains articles which are read at many sisterhood meetings, Branch reports, from which one may gauge the varifold activities our groups are engaged in all over the country."

"I didn't know the New York Branch has activities all over the country," my friend interrupted with a puzzled look.

"Of course it hasn't," I answered rather impatiently. "We have branches all over the country, of which the Greater New York, or Metropolitan Branch, is only one. And by the way, the Women's Institute of Jewish Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary under the auspices of Hadassah, Ivriah, The Council of Jewish Women and the Women's League of the United Synagogue, was started by the Metropolitan Branch of the Women's League."

"Yes, I know that," was the reply. "The Chairman of our Education Committee has taken some of the courses there and now she is directing a sisterhood study course."



"Then you have profited by the Women's League," I answered quickly.

"Yes," with a smile, "I suppose we have. A group of us, by the way, expects to be present at the large Hanukkah luncheon. They like to get together with a large mass of other synagogue women. It makes one feel less provincial than being just linked up with one's own sisterhood."

"Ah, now you are saying something," I answered. "And if you came to national conventions, you would meet women from Dallas, Minneapolis, Cleveland and Denver, Richmond, Boston and Canada, a picturesque gathering from north and south, east and west, of earnest, synagogue-minded Jewish women who bring with them the freshness of new ideas from which even your sisterhood could profit. Had you attended our National Convention at Detroit you would have had the pleasure of hearing Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt speak. From Branch reports you would have learned of the Student Houses in Philadelphia, the educational courses in New Jersey and the Seminary Teas there that have netted a large sum for our great rabbinical institution.

"Seminary Teas?" inquiringly.

"Yes, so that our National Project, the raising of funds to help support the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, may be carried out in the spirit of sociability and cooperation. So in New Jersey, a half dozen neighborhood sisterhoods arrange a joint tea, charge a nominal admission fee and invite an outstanding speaker who expounds the needs and achievements of the Seminary. Then the sisterhoods contribute their donations. Many of our sisterhoods raise their funds in a like manner. Through joint effort, the sums raised through the National Project of Women's League have shown a phenomenal annual increase. The scholarships, one in memory of Dr. Cyrus Adler, the recently deceased President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the other in memory of Mrs. Mathilde Schechter, Founder of the Women's League, were established several years ago. These scholarships we hope to continue, and at the same time strive to raise much larger sums for the Seminary. We have now added another scholarship in honor of Mrs. Dora R. Spiegel, Honorary President of the National Women's League.

"Eventually we may be able to add a Synagogue to the Seminary buildings. We are now giving serious thought to such a project."

"Do you know," I added, "that years ago in a joint campaign with the United Synagogue, for the erection of a Synagogue and Center in Jerusalem, the Women's League raised over \$25,000? It helped to buy the ground on which the Yeshurun Synagogue (for which large sums were also collected in Jerusalem) now stands." I paused. My visitor threw up her hands.

"I yield!" she exclaimed, "and marvel at my own ignorance, my lack of imagination. Joint effort! National Project! You have used terms I never attributed to the Women's League. I came to a meeting at which they were discussing the raising of dues to the National Women's League, from twenty cents to thirty-five cents per capita. Our members simply couldn't see what we got out of the Women's League. But --you have put me on a new track. Would you say that the Women's League is the Women's Branch of the Seminary?"



"We don't so designate ourselves, yet, we are the women's group that is most concerned about the welfare of the Seminary. Our synagogue pulpits are occupied by Seminary Rabbis. Our religious schools are directed by Seminary teachers; our adult educational classes are led by Rabbis who are transmitting to Women's League groups all through the land, the wisdom and the inspiration that the Jewish Theological Seminary of America imparted to these Rabbis. We are therefore the Women's group to which the Seminary has a right to appeal for aid."

"And we can only do something really worthwhile for Judaism in a large sense, if we pool our strength," my guest added.

Only by pooling our strength, by meeting and working with other groups like ourselves can our full powers manifest themselves and provide the spiritual morale we so urgently need." I continued. "But why don't you come to our next convention and see for yourselves what the League is doing? You would hear what has been done in Toronto, Canada, how sisterhoods have been unified through the Chicago Branch, of the enthusiasm with which the Mid-West Branch organized. Read at your meetings extracts from Branch News as presented in the 'Outlook'. Pittsburgh, Eastern Pennsylvania have all done good work. Let your members know what other sisterhoods are doing so as to avoid that smug self-complacency that must ultimately result in stultification. And if you have something to give to others as you undoubtedly have, let the office know about it so that other groups may benefit through your talents."

"A matter of give and take," my friend interposed.

"Exactly," I answered, "not even the largest sisterhood in America can afford to remain an entity by itself and nothing more. How do you like the Current Jewish Events you receive through the League, prepared by Mrs. Leon S. Lang of Philadelphia, Pa."

"Why, I never heard of them," she replied, "You mean you do not have one of your own members present the current Jewish News?" I questioned.

"No, we have such a full program that there is no time for them."

"But the Handbook lists Current Jewish Events in every one of its monthly programs," and I turned the pages of the Handbook.

"But I have never seen this book before, never heard of its existence. Prayers for meetings," she mused, "programs, suggestions for sisterhood activities, a bibliography, themes for study circles. No, I am seeing the Handbook for the first time. I'll buy this copy right now, (you can get another) and stick it right under the nose of our president." There was indignation in her voice.

"And take this, too," I said, handing her my own copy of Current Jewish Events, "read it, then show it to your president. Ask what she does with the copy she receives from the office to be read at meetings,--not to adorn waste baskets."

"This copy will certainly be read at tomorrow's meeting even if something else has to be omitted," she answered warmly. "I am beginning to see what we can gain from membership in a national organization like the League."



"What you can gain, a large sisterhood with all the contacts and advantages of Greater New York to draw on! Have you thought about the hundreds, perhaps thousands of localities throughout this great land that contain from thirty to a hundred Jewish families each. Where shall they go for inspiration, for encouragement? Letters come to the office by the scores, asking for material for children and how and where they can get the talent for an evening of Jewish music; how they should arrange a Jewish art meeting; an Oneg Shabbot; a symposium on peace, etc. A twelve year old boy from somewhere in North Carolina, where there are ten Jewish children between the ages of ten and fifteen, wants to know how to organize a club. We promptly turn over the letter to Young Judaea, which contacts the youthful group. A Christian minister in New Orleans wants information about outstanding Jewish women. We send him papers and refer him to certain books."

"Requests for material are daily met and fresh material is constantly being prepared. Mrs. Jesse Bienenfeld, our former National Chairman, prepared a fine course of lectures on Sisterhood Leadership, a pamphlet that every sisterhood should have in its files. National peace organizations, philanthropic groups, cultural organizations, request the League to become a constituent part. When Mrs. Samuel Spiegel was invited to a Tea at the White House in the interests of some phase of national welfare work, it was not only because of her charming personality, but because at that time she was the National President of the Women's League, a large, federated band of synagogue women influential in American life. Through the League your sisterhood is represented on many an important national organization. Did you know that?"

My visitor had listened wide-eyed and now took a long breath.

"No, indeed," she said humbly, "you have taken all the self-sufficiency out of me."

"Can any Jew remain sufficient unto himself in days like these when the entire problem of Jewish survival is at stake?" I went on. "We must gather all the forces of the synagogue into a closer union if the spiritual ideals of Judaism are to survive. Jewish living and thinking must be clarified through education. Your sisterhood has all it can do to strengthen the congregation and make Judaism effective among its members. Conscious of the power that comes through union, aware of the limitations of any single group, we have formed a national organization with interlacing branches into which every sisterhood can pour some strength, and from which it may draw the abundance that only joint effort can provide."

The Women's League of the United Synagogue supplies its groups with speakers, literature, papers, helpful contacts and discussions, the constructive advice that comes from wide contacts. The least that the sisterhoods can do is to provide the fuel that keeps the League's vital energies alive, the thirty-five cent per capita tax that comes through affiliation. Rather cheap at that. Don't you think so?"

"Yes indeed," said my friend, rising to go. "Thanks for all you have told me."