

- All right, Jeremy, thank you. Sorry, over to you. Thank you.

- So ladies and gentlemen, today, it's a controversial subject. I have, from an early age, been very concerned about the role of women and the way they're treated. Certainly, being brought up in England in the 50s, where women still had to have their husband's permission to open a bank account, reading Simone de Beauvoir, and then later some of the feminist writers, I have always found myself to be aware of the unfairness of a male chauvinist society. And then, when I look back at the history of mankind, including the history of Judaism, I see the problems and I've always tried to find ways of getting around them and levelling the playing fields. Now, today's session is going to be divided into three different areas.

Area number one is I'm going to give a brief overview of some of the women throughout Jewish history who have had an impact and not given a sufficient recognition, as was in the case of art and lots of other subjects like that; Secondly, I want to look at Judaism in terms of its religious position in relation to women; And finally, I want to come to the question of "What can, should be done, "needs to be done "to sort things out to "as many people's satisfaction as possible?"

When you go back to the Torah, so we're going back roughly 3,000, more, years ago, it is clearly a male document talking about gods and kings. And although women play an important part, although right at the beginning of Genesis, men and women, in chapter one, are created at the same time, the story about the ribs comes later, and nevertheless, there are clear role definitions. But the interesting thing about the Torah, and the time of the Torah, is that whereas it reserves certain appointments for men, let's say the priesthood, the leadership is Moses. Moses has two subdivisions, a subdivision of Aaron, the priest, based on heredity, and the subdivision of Miriam, the sister, who is described as a prophetess.

Now, the difference between a prophet and a priest is that the priest was hereditary appointment, you inherited it. The prophet was never appointed by anybody, it was entirely a matter of charisma, which is why you find women prophets, starting with Miriam, which in itself is an interesting marker. And therefore, if things started so well, in a way, and you have women prophets, what went wrong later on? Was it intrinsic or was it a result of the males trying to reserve all the best jobs for themselves? Now, the first, shall we say, political leader, female political leader, was of course Deborah.

She was described both as a judge and as a prophetess. Judges were supposed to be political appointments but it seems that her stage, there was no problem about a woman being both a political leader and a spiritual leader. Maybe because the next woman in a serious position of power was the famous Jezebel's daughter, Athalia. Jezebel, the queen of the north, wife of Ahab, a committed pagan. Her daughter, Athalia, married into the house of King David. When her husband died, she made a play for the... Actually, it wasn't her husband had died, it was...

Or her husband died, her eldest son was appointed king briefly, but he was killed, and immediately she made a play for power. She killed all the other sons, all the members of the inner household, except for one kid that was spirited away by her sister-in-law and hidden.

And she imposed this very strong, passionate pagan regime over the Judean household. When the child was old enough, he was brought out from hiding. There was a coup d'etat, he was placed on the throne under the guardian of his aunt, and she was killed off. So in a sense, you could say the first queen of the Judean household was a bit of a disaster, but given her background, you wouldn't be surprised.

The next queen actually was during the period of the Hasmoneans, so we're now going to roughly 2,200 years ago. The Jewish community has been split between those living in Babylon, those who've come back to the land of Israel. Under the land of Israel, initially under Alexander the Great, everything went well. But then, unfortunately, Alexander's generals who took over, the Seleucids in the north and the Ptolemies in the south, fought with each other, and Israel, the Jews, were caught in the middle. And after a period of tension, specifically with the Syrian North, the Hasmoneans led a rebellion and took, eventually... It took a long time. Eventually took control of their own affairs.

So you've heard of Judah Maccabee, you've heard of his brothers. The brothers slowly, after a very good start, got more and more, shall we say, detached from their spiritual roots. So after the initial family of Judah, you have a series of kings. The most famous one is Alexander Jannaeus, Jannai. Although he succeeded John Hyrcanus. John Hyrcanus had a son called Aristobulus I, and Aristobulus was married to this lovely lady called Salome. Salome Alexandra, or known as Shlomtzion. There's a street in Jerusalem under that name, Schlomtzion Hamalka.

Now, Aristobulus unfortunately was a nasty piece of work. He killed his competing brothers and, after a short period, something must have got to him. Some people say Salome poisoned him, a bit unfair. He died and Salome became queen. But she was under pressure, and so she married another brother, and that's how she married Alexander Yannai. Alexander Yannai ruled and he ruled aggressively. He fought with everybody, he divided the kingdom, he exacerbated the ill feeling towards the rabbis, he supported the priests, he was more inclined to spend time in Greek-Roman society than in Jewish society. He was a nasty piece of work and as a result of alienating and attacking all around in countries, his reign was marked by warfare.

It was when he died that Salome took over for the second time, and this time she did a brilliant job. She healed, she made peace with everybody. There was an atmosphere of wellbeing, and happiness, and success in the land. She was respected by everybody, highly regarded by everybody. Probably, you could argue, the most successful monarch, apart from maybe Hezekiah after the reigns of King Solomon. And so, she was good but for one thing, she was a Jewish mother. And at some stage, she thought her two sons really ought to be king, or high priest, or takeover from her, and so she handed over to Aristobulus II, who wasn't very nice, and John Hyrcanus II, who wasn't very nice, and they screwed things up and it got so bad, it ended

up with Herod and it ended up with a destruction, more or less.

After the Hasmonean Dynasty was destroyed, There was one other queen who's mentioned in the Talmud, and in fact her grave can be found in Jerusalem today, in Sheikh Jarrah of all places. And her name was Queen Helena of Adiabene. Queen Helena, mentioned in the Talmud, She was a convert from this... Her kingdom, essentially, was Kurdistan, and she converted to Judaism, and decided to spend more and more time in Jerusalem, leaving her son, Monobaz, in charge back home.

The Talmud mentions the fact that she contributed massively to the temple, to study. She invited the rabbis to come round to her home. Even on Sukkot, they all came and sat in her sukkah. And there was special decorations she made to the temple. And she clearly held this important position, and she was respected by everybody. She wasn't treated in any way like a second class citizen.

That was all before, I hate to have to say it, before the Christian world brought in this idea that there is a distinction between the female, who is less reliable, less trustworthy, and more emotional, and the male, who is stronger, and more intelligent, and other rubbish that came in, and the ideal was celibacy, and a celibate priesthood, and so forth and so on, which changed various attitudes in the countries in which Jews lived. The next woman I want to mention is a remarkable woman called, initially, Beatriz de Luna. She was from one of the richest Spanish families, and she and her family became Marranos. They outwardly became Christian, but inwardly maintained secretly their Jewish identity.

And then of course, as you know, the Inquisition came. 1492, the Jews were expelled from Spain. But the main point of the Inquisition was to root out semi-Jews, the Marranos. And so Beatriz moved from Spain, with her family, to Portugal, where she changed her name to Gracia Mendes. Later on, she's going to add a Hebrew name to that but this moment, it's a nice name, Gracia Mendes. And again, in Portugal, she was living like a Christian outwardly. She married into the richest banking family of Portugal. And this was a banking family in which two brothers, one in Portugal, one was in Spain...

In Antwerp, which was part actually of the Spanish Empire at that moment, we are talking about sort of 1550, somewhere in that region. The husband in Portugal died, and so Gracia Mendes decided it's time anyway to get out of Portugal because the Inquisition is moving in here. "I'm going to take the wealth from here, "move to Antwerp, "join my brother-in-law, "and establish our business there." She escaped out of Portugal, came to England first, as a Christian, and then from England, she managed to get to Antwerp, but still she had to pretend that she was a Christian. In Antwerp, unfortunately, the other brother died.

And so, this woman, Dona Gracia Mendes, becomes the sole owner of one of the most powerful banks in Europe. And she was courted by the Spanish emperor, Charles V, and they were household guests. But slowly, she realised that her Jewish identity was both being suppressed

and was putting her in danger. And so, she decided, "I have to escape." And so, in those days, the way for Jews, who were still not recognised as Jews in the context of both England, and Antwerp, and Spain and Portugal, of course, was to be smuggled on an underground railway type of arrangement down from Antwerp, down the Rhine Valley, down to Switzerland, from Switzerland into northern Italy.

And it was very perilous because there were spies all along the road trying to rob them, trying to hand them over to the Inquisition. It was a terribly difficult, and lots of people got caught and killed, and not many managed to survive but some did get through that route. And she ended up coming to over the mountains into Venice. And officially, still, she is this rich banker's wife, this widow with all that money.

In Venice, she has a disagreement with her sister. And her sister, who thinks she isn't getting as much money as she should, betrayed her to the Inquisition in Venice. And the Inquisition imprisoned her and confiscated all her money. Now it's so happened... Do you know Italy? There are different areas, dukedoms in Italy. And the Duke of Ferrara had always welcomed Jews and allowed them to flourish. And when he heard that Gracia Mendes was in trouble, he brought all his weight to bear on Venice, got her out of Venice, retrieved her money, brought her to Ferrara, and said, "You are welcome to stay "as long as you like." And at that moment, she came out as a Jew. She added Nasi, "president" if you like, to her name.

So Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi, she became. And then, she set about making it her business to save as many Jews from the Inquisition as she possibly could, and she used her wealth to do this. For example, Jews in Ancona, in Italy, were imprisoned, and were facing torture, and burnt at the stake. And she organised a blockade of the port, and managed to get, through her contacts in the Ottoman Empire, pressure to bear in order to help people. Meanwhile, she had a nephew. Her nephew, who had come up through Spain, into Portugal, into Antwerp, had then moved, as a representative of the bank, to the Ottoman Empire.

In the Ottoman Empire, at that stage, the Jews could mix pretty freely, even though they were dhimmis, they were sort of tolerated, had to spend a special tax. And this guy, called Joseph Nasi, became incredibly close to the upper Ottoman classes, an advisor to the king. So much so, that he was given an island between Turkey and Greece as his, and he became the Duke of Naxos. Joseph Nasi, Duke of Naxos. And he, together with his mother... With his aunt, Dona Gracia Mendes, managed to make themselves the address for financial support, for Jewish communities, for study, for Torah, for political help and relief. They were magnificent. And there several books written.

And my source of course is a famous English, Cyril Roth, but there are plenty of others that you could look up to find more about them. But of course, why was she successful? Because she had money. And it's therefore the beginning of the idea that strikes me. That one of the issues is not just feminism, it's the difference between those with money and those without money. The next example I want to give comes from 200 years later. It comes from northern Germany,

Hamburg. The area of Hamburg, Altona, which is now incorporated in Hamburg, towards Denmark in the north and towards Holland to the south.

And there's a lovely lady called Glückel. Happy, Gluck! Glückel of Hameln She's called "of Hameln" because that's where her husband came from, but really she spent most of her life in Hamburg. And she was born in 1646, and she lived a long, healthy life. Her first husband was a successful businessman, but he worked in partnership with her and he encouraged her to go to the various markets, to travel alone in what was very risky conditions very often, and to participate in the trading that they had to do. And she wrote a diary, and this diary records how tough life was for Jews in Germany at that moment.

You couldn't live anywhere without getting special permission. They didn't want you to have permission, you often had to live somewhere outside. You had to get day passes to come into cities, to get into fairs. There was one restriction after another. And not only that, but you were surrounded by people who were very often highwaymen, robbers. One of the advantage of being a Jew was you didn't necessarily have to carry money because if you had a relative in a different town, you could get a letter of credit. And this is one of the reasons why the Jews were managed to survive.

But we're not talking about large numbers, we're talking about a couple of thousands in the whole of what we call Germany in Northern Europe, at that particular moment. But she, in her diary, wrote. She wrote about her life. She was given an education, maybe not a Talmudic education, but she knew Hebrew, she spoke in Yiddish. And she writes this diary, which combines giving good advice to her children. She had 14 children, two of whom did not survive, and she succeeded in marrying them all off some of the top Jewish families around Europe. One of her sons was the head of the Jewish community... Ashkenazi community in England. And they travelled all around the place, they moved around this amazing network.

Unfortunately, Glückel's husband died. Died after very happy marriage and she had to fend for herself, and she did. She took on the whole of the business, and it flourished, and she did well. But she came, unfortunately, under pressure. She came under pressure, first of all, because this was also the time of the famous Shabbetai Tzevi, false Messiah, when they thought that the Messiah was coming in the Ottoman Empire and everybody should go there. Her father and father-in-law had both prepared food and clothes to go with them on the journey, and she was divided.

She wasn't certain she wanted to go on this long journey. And one of the answers to it was she got married again. And this way, she obviously got married to somebody who was prepared to stay put, she stayed put. And it was a happy marriage for a short while, until, unfortunately, he went bankrupt. He lost all his money, everything, including her money, the lot, went down the drain, and this poor woman, at her advanced age, had to start again. And she did, and she built up a business. She was such a remarkable, strong, pious, good woman. I would say the ideal, if you like. And yet, her life is hardly known. There are books written, several, and new ones

recently come out about her, but that's Glückel of Hameln.

The next person I want to mention is another unusual person, but unusual in a different way because after this period, you have the development of Hasidism. And Hasidism is a new, pious, popular movement that grew up in Eastern Europe, but with tremendous influence from Kabbalah and from Tzvat, from the mystics in Tzvat. And whereas up to that moment, Judaism was primarily academic, you had to study and that decided who was important and who was not, now you had a new movement which was charismatic, in which the leaders didn't have to be great scholars, but they have to be caring people who could gather people around and give them help and support, psychological and social. But this was a male society.

The founder of Hasidism was a man. All the people who followed him, his pupils, they were men. But there was one woman. And this woman was known as the Maid of Ludmir, who was born in the Ukraine in 1805 to a rich merchant who belonged to the dynasty of Chernobyl. Yes, the Chernobyl we now know for the disaster. Because she was well off, she was able to live the sort of life she chose, and she was interested in studying, she was interested in academic life.

And slowly, she became known as somebody who other people could turn to. And when her father died, she took over the house and turned it into a kind of a centre, a Chabad centre type of place. And she became known as the female Rebbe, the Maid of Ludmir to whom people came with their questions, with their problems. She taught, she spoke, she had special chambers where she could be alone, and other chambers where people could come and interact with her. And she was happy doing this.

But unfortunately, the male chauvinists all gathered round and they decided she had to get married. She didn't want to get married, they pushed her to get married. And unfortunately, of course, it didn't work. And with a short period of time, she was told by the Rebbe of Chernobyl, "Stop! You can't be in competition with me." And so, the woman left and she went to live in Israel. And in Israel, she was able to carry on giving her advice, and giving her leadership until she died at the ripe old age, when she... In 1888.

The last person I want to mention is a woman called Bertha Pappenheim. You might not have heard of Bertha Pappenheim, but if you've been interested in Freud, or alternatively, with the Freudian hierarchy, including Breuer, you'll know that Breuer wrote about a woman called Anna O. And Anna O. was a Viennese neurotic girl who he thought was having her blackouts because she was living in a suppressed Orthodox Jewish household. And if only she could be freed from this Orthodox Jewish household, she would be cured.

Well, Breuer couldn't carry on his relationship with her because he felt she was getting a bit too dependent on him, he was a bit worried about it, and the matter was transferred to Freud. But that was Bertha Pappenheim. Now, the interesting thing about Bertha Pappanheim is that whereas most Viennese women were not granted any education, non-Jewish, they were supposed to be objects, hostesses, beautiful things, having these chambers where people

would come to for music and for society, involved in sexual activity, Bertha Pappenheim got a solid education. Her father saw to it she got a solid education. Not only that, but her father and her mother encouraged her to be independent. So all of Breuer's assumptions about what was wrong had nothing to do with what he thought had to do.

And not only that, but Bertha Pappenheim was encouraged to live a creative, feminist life. She translated, from the English, the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, the feminist writings. She campaigned for the rights of poor Jewish girls, who in some situations were being sold into slavery, she campaigned for Jewish education, she helped set up Jewish schools, and she remained all this time a single person. And interestingly enough, she had a portrait painted of her dressed as Glückel of Hameln.

So clearly Glückel of Hameln was her heroine. She was, by far, everybody's taste. She was not a great fan of Zionism. She did participate in Jewish life in Germany, when she moved to Frankfurt, and she played a major role. And unfortunately, her attitude to Zionism changed dramatically towards the end of her life when she saw how much anti-Semitism there was in Germany. And she died, unfortunately, in 1936, or maybe fortunately because had she stayed there, she would not have escaped Auschwitz.

Now, these are examples of women who managed to make it, but the trouble is, as with anything, the number of people who managed to make it to the top anyway in any area, in any system, is very, very limited. And so, now I want to come back and look at, "What was the Jewish attitude? "What is the Jewish attitude? "And how did it come," as I am afraid, I believe, "to be unfair in many areas "in regard to women, "for all that it does and demand respect, "and treatment, and yada, yada, yada?" So if we go back to the period of the Bible, what does the Bible actually say with regard to women?

Well, first of all, that in terms of civil rights, I'm talking about civil rights, men and women were equal. There were certain areas, such as the temple, or the tabernacle, where men and women went together. It's true that much later on in the second temple, there was a question of dividing them off, but not to begin with. Everybody turned up at the tabernacle, everybody turned up. Everybody was at Mount Sinai, men, women, and children. There was no discrimination in that sense. The only case of discrimination is where you weighed up the value of a human being's work, in which a stronger person got a higher value on the labour market than somebody who was less so.

But you did have a situation in which marriage was considered the domain of the male. And according to the Torah, a man could have more than one wife, as we know for Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and so forth, and so on. And the Torah talks about marriage, but also allows for divorce. It allows for divorce, but uses a language that says if you want a divorce, you have to write a bill of divorce. Somewhere along the line, it emerged that only men could offer that bill of divorce. But otherwise, when it comes to respecting parents, loving parents, all those things, men and women were... As far as the text of the Torah concerned, were equal. The issue was not so

much with the text, except for one single example.

The single example is the example that we read of in the synagogue a week ago of the Sotah. What was the Sotah? The Sotah was a woman who had not only been suspected of adultery, but had been actually warned not to consort with a man who the husband told her not to consort with, and she went ahead and consorted with him. And this was against a background in which Jewish law never accepted evidence that was circumstantial. So according to Jewish law, you could see a man and a woman going into a hotel room, lock the door behind them, spend the whole night there, in the morning come out, and you could not convict them of monkey business. They might've been playing chess for all you know. You needed actual evidence, you needed witnesses.

So here, you have a situation where a husband's pretty sure his wife's got up to monkey business, but they don't have evidence. Now, in those days, and for thousands of years afterwards, there was something called trial by ordeal. We know this from Paul, which is being dipped into the water and drowned. We know from all other things. In those days, the most important trial by ordeal was an oath, to swear by God, 'cause they really took God seriously. We don't, we use God's name left, right, and centre all the time. And when we swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in court, you know and I know that most people aren't going to do that.

But in those days, they took it very seriously, and therefore oaths were one way of deterring people from telling a lie, and getting them to come out and tell the truth. So this question of oaths and courts was one tool, and the other was this Sotah, in which you would come to the priest, the priest would say, "Look, if you've done something wrong, confess now, "otherwise I'm going to give you some special water, "with God's name dissolved in it "and with dust from the temple floor, "and you're going to drink this, "and if you did something wrong, "it's going to affect your body." The sort of thing that happens in Africa today, where witch doctors will say, "You're going to die. "Go to this hut the end of the village "and you die," and that's it.

And so, the hope was that she would confess. But if she didn't confess, and she took the water, and everything went well, then she'd go back to her husband and they'll all live happily ever after. Now, that seemed terribly unfair to me. And if you look at the text in the Torah, it does seem, if you take it out of the context of 3,000 years ago. But then what happens is that the Talmud, at a later stage, is going to come and start modifying this. The rabbis are going to take steps, 2,000 years ago, to modify these rules. The first thing they said initially was "This water works on the husband "as much as it works on the woman. "The woman might be the front person "but if the husband's done any monkey business, "he's going to get it too." That's quality.

Secondly, they said, "You know what? "We're not going to have this anymore. "This is not acceptable. "The men aren't behaving any better, "why the heck should we give them a privilege "that the women don't have?" And therefore, Yohanan ben Zakkai, famous Roman period, stopped it completely. There's one thing that, until recently, I didn't know, and that is roundabout

the year 700, before the common era, the Jews from Judea sent a garrison down to Egypt, on behalf of the Babylonian Empire, in a place called Elephantine, Yeb, an island near Aswan today, and they had their own temple, they had their own Jewish community life there. And it's interesting that relatively recently, from these Elephantine documents and excavations, we've discovered a lot about this garrison in Elephantine.

We've discovered, for example, a letter from Darius, the Emperor of Persia, who was appealed to by the Jews in Elephantine, saying "The local Egyptian priests are attacking us. "They won't let us keep the Passover." And this letter, which actually was discovered also in the Geniza, comes and... A copy of it, and says, "No, you've got to allow them to do it. "Don't mess with them. "You mess with them, "I'm going to mess with you." Included in these documents from Elephantine, we found out women did have equality with men, they could give divorces, they could run their own affairs.

All the things that later on they weren't allowed to do, they were doing there and it's documented. So something went wrong. Where did it come from? I don't think it came from us, I think it came from somewhere else . That's the only comfort I can get out of all this. But the Talmudic rabbis did take serious steps. For example, until the Talmudic period, a woman was married to a man in a transaction, a transaction based on money or document or something like that.

And although the Torah said that a man has certain obligations to his wife, , he has to be committed to feeding her, to clothing her, and interestingly enough to satisfying her sexually. And if she didn't accept and if he didn't do any of those, the courts would punish him or give her some way out of the marriage. The rabbis went further. The rabbi said, "Look, we're living in different times now. "We are living in different economic times. "I'm not going to allow people "to just marry off like that. "We are going to introduce "something called a ketubah," a document, "which protects the assets of the wife, "which protects her in the event "of divorce or widowhood, "which takes care of her and her family, "doesn't allow anybody else do it," and that remains part of the Jewish marriage ceremony to this very day.

There's a transactional side and there is a, shall we say, romantic side to the wedding ceremony. So this idea of the ketubah is fundamental. Now, of course, in the diaspora nowadays, this is purely symbolic because we all rely on the law of the land to solve our marital financial problems. But the... In Israel, where marriage laws are in the law of the state, there are many, many examples of where the rabbinic court rely entirely on ketubah. In fact, that's the dominant case. And therefore, in Israel, the ketubah is a kind of a premarital document, and you put in it all the assets, a whole lot of other stuff, all these financial details, which, in the diaspora, we don't do to the same extent.

I just mentioned that in passing to show that the impact of this change has come down to our times, and to show that they were, at one stage, prepared to make these changes, and they were prepared to deal with issues such as the mamzer, the person from... In fact, an

incestuous... Child of an incestuous marriage. They were prepared to deal with the agunah and make life easier, the woman whose husband has disappeared. They were prepared to deal with husbands who refuse to give divorces, but they didn't go far enough. And therefore, we have the situation that we are in today, in which there are sectors of our community who are still strongly male chauvinists, who refuse to make changes. And one of the reasons why they do is because for over 1,000 years, our legal system has, in a sense, been influenced by the non-Jewish world.

And after all, bear in mind that women couldn't get a vote in Switzerland until 1971; Women couldn't get into Cambridge University before 1920, or at least not have a degree; That John Knox wrote about the horrible, disastrous regimen of women; Voltaire, for all being an enlightenment, in addition to being an antisemite, was an anti-feminist. And so, in one way, I'm comforted by the fact that everybody else has been even worse than we have. And our tradition of respect, and the Talmud's tradition of respect for one's wife, and love for one's wife is there, everybody to see.

But nevertheless, slowly, over a period of time, particularly Christian society, where divorce was not looked on acceptable, Catholic Church still struggles with it to this day. And certainly for a long time, as we know from Henry VIII, it was a very big problem. So in that atmosphere, the Jews did not want to appear to be too lenient to the Christian authorities. And just as they bow to them over Spinoza's excommunication, they tended to bow over matters of marriage, and divorce, and of the position of women in society in general. So that whereas on an individual level, it has to be said that there was a tremendous amount of partnership and support, as we see throughout the period of the Crusades and at other times, nevertheless Jews adopted the dominant attitude of the society in which they lived towards women.

And therefore, we have a situation today where there are two kinds of problems that concern women in Judaism. One of them is what we call 'ritual,' and the other is what we might call 'transaction.' By that, I mean to say that, to this day, it is the man who gives the divorce. We can bring pressure on the man to give a divorce, in Israel they'll put you in prison, and in other places there may be financial fines imposed on somebody who... A male who refuses to give a divorce, but that is not acceptable. We should not be relying on other non-Jewish legal systems to sort out our own problem because we haven't taken advantage of the tools that exist within our tradition to make it more equal and level the playing fields.

So on one level, there has been a failure to change that particular situation. Secondly, it's not until Maimonides... Maimonides, 1,000 years ago, he was the first person to say "All leadership positions in Judaism should be male." Nobody said that beforehand. He said it, and that's been adopted universally. And that's one of the reasons why in the Charedi world, up to now, women have not been able to play a political role. I'm glad to say that that is now beginning to change slowly, but it's going to take a very long time before it does change. And then, there is the question of the agunah, the question of a woman whose husband has disappeared, we don't know where he is and therefore she remains an agunah, she remains tied. The rabbis tried to

solve it. They relaxed the evidence rules, they did whatever they could. And in fact, by and large, they made it a lot, lot easier to solve the problem. And there, again, were tools.

The worst comes the worst, you can annul the original marriage. And unfortunately, what has happened is that if you are a male in most Jewish communities, you can probably get somebody to help you and find a way around the law. If you are a female, it's a heck of a lot harder. And I believe that if the boot were on the other hand... On the other foot, that is to say if women held the upper hand, you bet the men would do something about trying to level the playing fields, but they don't. And this is one of my major complaints, or one of the areas where I think Jewish law has, within it, the potential to change but there are several factors that prevent that change.

Part of it is the lingering male chauvinism. Part of it also is the responses I've mentioned before here to secular society, precisely because of the Holocaust and the feeling that non-Jewish values don't respect Jewish life, or Jewish values. "Why should we pay any attention to them? "They just want to get rid of us. "So I'm certainly not going to bend to "what they think is the right thing to do." But part of it of course is inertia, and that's one of the problems with all bureaucratic and political organisations. They never really grasp the nettle and they carry on preserving power, preserving authority, and which is one of the reasons why I personally have great difficulty with rabbinic authority, not in terms of, if you like, scholarship and knowledge, but in terms of the ability to develop a system that values individual cases.

And ironically, this is the case in Jewish law, where Jewish law, by and large, says treat each case as a separate case, and treat it with consideration and fairness. So these are the areas where I think there could be, and should be, change. The other feature in this is what we call the ritual. The ritual changed during the Talmudic period when the rabbis introduced a principle which said any command that's related to time in the Torah, women are not obliged to carry out.

After all, if a woman's got a baby crying, you can't expect her to drop the baby and say, "Oh, too bad it's time for morning service," or similarly if the pot's on the boil in the kitchen. So what was intentionally... Originally intended to be a way of making life easier for women ended up in our day as creating a problem. Because since women were freed from the public obligation, part of it to help, part of it because, as in parts of the world today, women are expected to stay at home, covered from top to toe, not put a foot outside, and certainly not mixed with anybody, certainly not appear in a public court or anything like that. And so, part of it was indeed a result of keeping women out in the and away from things.

But this whole attitude unfortunately began to play out in areas which today we find problematic. One of them is that women were not supposed to have an education. And as we know... I mentioned Oxford and Cambridge before, and as we know this is relatively recent. Initially, originally, women were discouraged because the men said, "You've got to stay at home "and look after the children," which was said very often in American society too, and still is in parts today, if you're a good Mormon maybe.

And the result of this is that unfortunately women were therefore not expected to turn up at the synagogue. It wasn't an obligation on them, it was an option if they wanted to but they weren't part of the main process. And now, where we're looking for equality, we have a distinction between the areas such as study, where more and more women, within the ultra-orthodox world, are studying, are knowledgeable. There are centres in yeshivot for women to study, and I know women who know more than most men. And that area is automatically changing because that area is to do with charisma, it's to do with the personality of the teacher, the personality of the person, so to speak.

But when it comes to appointments, who appoints rabbis, who takes what position, there we're back into the realm of male domination. And the male argument is that because the synagogue is optional as far as women are concerned, you can't expect somebody for whom it's optional to act on behalf of those for whom it's obligatory. But the truth of the matter is the amount of stuff that is obligatory in the Torah, in the service in itself, is not that much. There's nothing to stop a woman teaching, nothing to stop a woman giving pastoral help, social help, giving a class, being there, available, which is most of what rabbis, for example, do. It's what the Maid of Ludmir did, but she didn't stand up in a synagogue to do it. I believe, have always believed, in alternatives.

And I have to admit, put my cards on the table, that my nieces in Israel disagree strongly with what I'm going to say, but this is the nearest I can get to find a satisfactory solution. The services that we have within the Orthodox male world were male services, developed by men to meet the needs of men within that structure. And they themselves are varied. Some of them are cantorial and formal, some of them are informal, some of them have no rabbis, some of them have no cantors, they change according to different cultures and where they are. Rarely will you find two that are identical. And therefore, we have choices in where we go to pray.

To me the answer to these problems is, "Let's set up more synagogues, "not fewer ones. "Let's see what female spirituality is. "Let me, as a male, "sit behind the mechitza at a service of women "that I find more attractive, if I do. "Let there be more, not less." I believe that when you try to tinker around, whether it's tinkering around with the text of the Bible, whether it's tinkering around with established services, then all this does is create more friction and more division rather than offering alternatives. So the issue as far, as I'm concerned, when it comes to equality is there has to be equality. There must be equality. And wherever you have a law that that gets in the way of this equality, it must be dealt with. It can be dealt with. It was dealt with in the past, it should be dealt with now.

But where you have a matter of spirituality and a matter of personal preferences, I think you have to allow for old codgers carrying on with the old codgers system, for new progressives to try the new progressive system, and see what works in the marketplace. If it works, fine. If it doesn't work, we can always fall back on other modalities and other situations. And therefore, to conclude, I feel very, very bad that there should be any inequality in terms of how a male or a female develop within Judaism. But I recognise that there are different kinds of environments. I think one has to validate those different kind of environments, and not expect everybody to

conform to the same pattern and the same situation. So on that note, I will end my formal presentation and see how much I've either offended people or have not offended them, or said being dramatic enough. So over to questions and answers.

- [Judi] Jeremy, can you see the Q&A?

- Yep, I can see the Q&A and I'm starting with a member of a group in my shul, Judith Stone. Can you hear me? I mean, it's all right, am I answering? "Women in Judaism. "We've been going for over 20 years "and involved in promoting learning for women "as well as running services in shul, "including bat mitzvah services." That's wonderful, there are more and more cases like that. When I was running Yakar in London, we had alternative services for women, reading the Megillah, and women were able to read the Torah in their own environment and do what they felt, so I'm all in favour of that.

"No mention of Queen Berenice. "No mention of Queen Berenice." Well, you know, I have to say, I don't rate Queen Berenice as being that great an example, but nevertheless I do accept that I could have mentioned Queen Esther. It's just that Queen Esther herself didn't have total control over her situation, she was very much subject to other people. That's why Cecil Roth... Did I not say Cecil Roth? I should have done. I've got enough books of his, I should have done.

Anyway, "I did a..." Helen, "I did a Jewish historical tour "of Spain and Portugal. "Marrano's considered derogatory term, "refer to them as conversos." That's right, 'Marranos' basically is 'pigs.' 'Conversos,' well, that's what they were called. 'Conversos' is the more noble and the preferable version, so you are quite right. Again, I missed out Queen Esther because I thought she was more passive, and after all she was subject to that fat, drunken king of hers... Husband of hers who thought he could just throw a woman out when she displeased him.

"Can we see the list of these women?" "Perhaps just a book list reason."

- [Judi] Don't worry, Jeremy. I'm sure it'll be... Just wait for them to ring off. There we go.

- I don't know why I can't take it off, I thought I had. Anyway, so a list of women, yes. I mean, if you look up Dona Gracia Mendes on the internet, if you look up Glückel of Hameln, if you look up Bertha Pappenheim, you will see them on the internet and you can get lots of publications and evidence there, so definitely. But otherwise, if anybody wants to email me, jeremy@jeremyrosen.com, then I will be perfectly happy to give you some suggestions of what books you can use.

Q: "What about Rashi's daughters? "What about Rashi's daughters?"

A: Yes, Rashi's daughters' an excellent example, I could have mentioned Bruriah from the Talmud, lots of others. I just chose some of the more colourful ones who had made careers for themselves in a non-Jewish world, as well as in a Jewish world. But yes, Rashi's daughters were very serious.

"Rabbi Rosen mentioned 'is written in Yiddish?' Yes, that's quite right, it was written in Yiddish. A wonderful translation out now. Yes, quite right. There is a latest book out on it, so you are quite right.

Barbara Miller, "My Jewish feminist identity "has been influenced, by amongst others, "the myth of Lilith.

Q: "Could you comment on her myth "and the role of women "as source of seduction?"

A: Well, Lilith is really not a Jewish idea or person at all. Mentioned only once in the Bible as being a spirit of the night, as a pagan spirit. And so, I don't for one minute take her as any kind of an example, or do I take the idea of considering women to be a sensual seductresses. I know where it comes from originally, the idea of the fruit in the Garden of Eden. But I don't have any more interest in Lilith than I do in half the angel names they mention and the spirits that people like to bring in. If she influences you in a positive way, well, why not? But I think the question of women being a seductress, you already find that in the Book of Solomon, in Proverbs. He's busy saying "Women are seductress, "be careful of the different women." And yet he ends the book of Proverbs with his famous Eishet Chayil, "What a wonderful woman. "The best thing can happen to anybody is "to find a wonderful woman." So there's always been this ambiguity.

Yes, I should have mentioned... Should have mentioned Bruriah. I did mention Deborah. "Value of testimony of the witness is not equal. "This is biblical." Well, yes and no. "Is it biblical?" It says , how that term, , "witnesses," can theoretically be understood. There are plenty of other examples of words that have been taken to understand that. So it's true that the Bible does talk about two witnesses, and this has been understood to be two witnesses, but they do allow for occasions where you can use one witness. So it depends on the rabbis who have used that in the past. And so if they've used that in the past, I don't see why they can't use it again. Muriel, no... Yes, okay, we've done that one.

Q: "Would you care to comment about Rabbeinu Gershom 100?"

A: Yes, well, Rabbeinu... The Torah allows for having more than one wife, definitely allows for having more than one wife. But the ideal, and most of the rabbis of the Talmudic period did not have more than one wife. There were some rabbis in the Talmudic period who had lots and lots of wives. One particular rabbi used to go into town on his circuit and say, "Anybody want to be my wife for a night?" So there are all kinds of different rabbinic attitudes, but you can. But nevertheless, again, probably under the influence of Christianity, Rabbeinu Gershom, living in Europe, on about 1,000 years, decided to ban two things, or at least three things. One of them was you're not allowed to read other people's private letters, and not to have more than one wife. And most people think this was a result of pressure from the Christian Church, like attitude to divorce, because in the Sephardi world you could have more than one wife. And in the Sephardi wife, you could go on having more than one wife until 1948, when those coming to Israel were told, "Sorry guys, no more." So this was an Ashkenazi response.

I think it's very good that there was such a response as that. But what is interesting is that

nevertheless, during this period from Rabbeinu Gershom and on, both in the Ashkenazi and in the Sephardi world, in your marriage document, you could put in extra conditions that you wanted to put in. So rich women could put in a condition, for example, in the Sephardi world, that you mustn't take another wife without my approval, or you must not have another wife. And they could put in conditions like that, as well as conditions of property. In the Ashkenazi world, this was no longer allowed. But here's another example of why I'm upset. There is a principle in Jewish law that when a special new law has been made, you can only undermine it or overrule it if you get the opinion of 100 rabbis. And therefore there've been cases where people have got round the problem of Rabbeinu Gershom ban on bigamy by rounding up a hundred odds and sods and saying, "These are 100 rabbis "and they give me permission "to marry somebody else." Well, I think that is scandalous, and if you can do that for them, they should do be able to do it for the women too. But there we are, this is another example of how, over time, men have always had this tendency to reserve for themselves what suits them more.

"As long as you're in regards unclean... "Be equal." Well, they're not regarded... This is absolute codswallop up to say they're unclean. We are all unclean. Unclean simply means you cannot go from a civil space, a secular space, to a religious space. That's to say you couldn't go into the temple if, for example, you were sick or ill, or if a man had had a wet dream. Whatever it is, there were certain conditions which said this is one kind of space, this is another kind of space. So the Hebrew word for "clean" and "unclean" is , which does not mean , clean or dirty. It's nothing to do that. It's just a matter of recognising spaces, give me my space. Just as, for example, I'm in quarantine, this is my space. It doesn't make me dirty in any way. So women are not regarded as any more unclean than men. I am as no less unclean now than any other person because what made you clean in the time of the temple was going to the mikvah with the ashes of a golden heifer burnt into dust. That hasn't existed for 2,000 years.

So we are all impure now, even if we do go to the mikvah, in the sense that you've just said. There is a law which says that after one has one's period, or after childbirth, one has to go to the mikvah in order to start a new phase, in order to enter into a new space. The value of this was also that men had to recognise that whether it was during the period or some other time, women might need to have their space. So please, it had nothing to do with cleanliness whatsoever.

Q: "Do you think that it's orth... It's fair in orthodox women are treated a second class citizens, not allowed to sit with "their husbands during the service?"

A: No, I think it's a matter of choice. It's a matter of "what do you prefer?" Some people like to have different spaces, some people don't, and therefore it's a matter of choice. There are synagogues where you can sit next to each other, so go to those, but don't try to impose your view on other people who want something different.

Q: Ansel, "Why can't men and women dance together?"

A: Well, you know the answer. If you dance... Start dancing together, you never know where it's going to lead. Now, that's part of a well-known Jewish joke. But I have to say, to be perfectly honest, when I came out of my yeshiva and for the first time entered into the secular world, and

in my communities they had dances, at weddings and other times like that, I was quite frankly taken aback to have men pouring other women's wives and holding them tight, and cheek to cheek, and all kinds of things like that. So I think it depends on what kind of dance you are talking about. If you're talking about, shall we say, the twist, where don't even touch, I find that less problematic than when you're in a very tight grip. But in the end, it's a question of what your motive is. Is your motive simply "this is a form of athletic, or aesthetic, "or musical pleasure?" Fine. But if it's "I want to get somebody "to go to bed with tonight," then I don't think it is.

"You can mention Bruriah." Yes, I did mention Bruriah, so we deal with that one.

"I thought women were encouraged to be literate. I thought women aren't alive." Yes they are encouraged to learn text, to learn their prayers, but there are some people who have said "this does not extend to Talmud. "Talmud is for men only." And there were such attitudes that were then, there are still today.

Q: "Doesn't the answer lie... "Doesn't the Talmud say , "men and women can conduct service?"

A: No, that doesn't mean to say they can conduct service. It means that they can be called to read from the Torah. And it's quite true. Women, according to the Talmud and Megillah, can be called to read to the Torah. But the Talmud also says that because in those days, women were considered to be not as dignified as men, it wasn't appropriate. And therefore, purely out of appropriateness, there is a tradition that women don't come in to mix with men in the same service, but they can be called up to read from the Torah in a different service, if they want to. So that's a question of clarification.

"Equality exists in reform Judaism." It does indeed, and people who are happy with it, I'm delighted they're happy with it.

Q: "If you reject progressive Judaism, how do change you seek to be infected?"

A: No, I don't reject progressive Judaism, I just say it's not for me. I don't enjoy it. If I'd enjoy it, I wouldn't reject it. But if it pleases other people, I'm delighted that it does.

Q: "What do my nieces suggest?"

A: Well, my nieces are absolutely egalitarian and they believe in playing a full part. One of my nieces is the rabbi of a progressive community in Israel, and they don't want to see... They think any suggestions of mine are being patronising. And they're entitled to their view and I respect their view. But that's... What can I do? "Female rabbis in orthodox shul?" There are. There are females teaching in orthodox shuls, synagogues. There are women already who are giving advice in orthodox shuls, but they don't carry out certain types of ceremonies that are very, very limited. Thank you very much, Dawn.

Q: "How can women wear sheitel consider themselves feminists?"

A: Well, I suppose they do because they say sheitel is a question of modesty. It's a question of being modest. "I choose to be modest by having a wig." Other people choose modesty in other

ways. Feminist, for us, means opportunity. Having the opportunity. Not being the same, but having the opportunities to do what I want to do, and that's what really matters.

Jocelyn, thank you. Thank you, Debbie.

Q: "Spiritual works outside of Judaism, what are your thoughts on this?"

A: Yes, of course, I believe they're spiritual. You can be spiritual in any situation. The Talmud itself says there are pious non-Jews who the world depends on for its survival, that there are pious people who get to heaven and don't have to be Jewish. We've never believed you have to be Jewish. And therefore, of course, there's spirituality everywhere. In every religion, you have a clash between, shall we say, the happy clappies and the establishment. You have dancing in Sufism, you have dancing all over the place. So yes, there's spirituality everywhere. You have to find the spirituality that works for you. Everybody's different. We can't have... Just as we don't have the same taste in food, we don't have the same taste in spirituality and everything.

Q: "Sephardi synagogues still keep women completely separate?"

A: Yes they do, and it's up to Sephardi women to set up their own services if they want to, if they care about it. Again, that's a matter of choice. There's a cultural difference. Most Sephardim still are influenced by 1,000 years living under Islam, and therefore it's going to take time for alternatives to come. I'm not saying alternatives necessarily will or should, but there we are.

Q: "Do you think women should get smicha in orthodoxy?"

A: Look, the term 'smicha,' a rabbinic ordination, basically does not mean what it once upon a time did. And the fact is that people I know actually pay to get a smicha sometimes. And people get the smicha simply because they know somebody who knows somebody, and therefore it's rather like a degree. You can't compare a degree from a top university to a degree from, shall we say, a correspondence course done part-time. I'm not saying there aren't values in both, I'm just saying they're very different. So in the end, it's never a matter of smicha, of who you get your ordination from, it's where you get your ordination from. Some synagogues are happy with an A class, some want a B class, some want a C class, and some don't want any class.

Irene, thank you, Irene. Thank you very much. Nice to hear from you. Hi .

"From , "another fascinating "in the service of God, "and it deals with women throughout history." S. Feldran, thank you. So that's a book to be recommended. Another tour de force.

"Regret my wife's unable to be with you." Thanks Barry, thank you very much. Thank you very much. Let's carry on, oopsy, down the list. Done. Anymore?

Sarah Camp, Belfast. "Lincoln UK was expelled in 1290, "I believe killed in London. "Belaset surviving could be found "in public records office in London." Thank you, Sarah. Thank you, that's very good.

"In Israel, a woman has been ordered to pay weekly fines to the state until she prepared to release her husband from their marriage. Also, passport, driver's licence have been revoked." You know, it's a good point, it cuts both ways. I mean, there have been women who've been refused, and there've been men who have refused. But in general, the women who refuse have a much tougher time sorting it out than the men do, unfortunately.

"You are speaking on behalf "of an orthodox attitude "rather than reform synagogue, ." Yes, I am. I'm speaking for me. I only speak for myself, I don't speak for anybody else. Magdeline,

Q: "How can be considered equal respect and a menstrual woman's compared with lepers and corpses? "Answer: life."

A: No, they're not. I didn't mean to say they're compared with, I meant simply to say that our bodies go through stages, and sometimes the idea of what is called purity and impurity simply recognises a different stage, a different state, as there are psychological states. It's not comparing them. I just gave those examples of where people who are not women also have different states, that's all.

Q: "You say women can have their own service with men so why not the Orthodox have a mixed service?"

A: The simple answer is if people want it, they'll have it. And if they don't want it, they don't have it. And there's always somewhere else to go if they want something different. So all I'm against is trying to change something that people are happy with. If people are not happy with, it's a free country, it's a free world, go somewhere else.

"A woman could be prime minister of the UK, but is put back and out of sight in the United Synagogue." Out of sight in United Synagogue. Well, if you take out of sight in the United Synagogue to be that, then don't go to the United Synagogue. It's as simple as that. I agree, there should be equality among all Jews, male and female.

Q: "How could this work when every morning, man thank God for making man? "Very chauvinistic."

A: Yes, there was a blessing 2,000 years ago of saying, "I'm glad I've not been made a woman because I'm glad that I have these obligations." There are many people who objected to that bracha then. There are many people today, including myself, who don't say that bracha, we say another bracha. I'm happy to say the same bracha as the woman. This is a matter of choice. And again, we have answer to...

Q: "Has there a situation where a woman may have more than one husband?"

A: Not that I'm aware of. I don't know if anybody can come up with it, but I'm not aware of... At least not legally anywhere. I'm sure there have been plenty of monkey business going on, but I'm not aware of any personally so I better not say anything.

Q: "Will women ever make a women for... With men?"

A: I don't know. I really don't know. I have no problem with whether it's reform, or progressive, or liberal, or whatever you want to call it, making their own decisions about how they want to live their Jewish life. All I am against is trying to force change. Just as in the Supreme Court in America, or any Supreme Court, change takes time. It's a real problem, but nevertheless... "I'm pleased to say " number of laws "who made great strides in the UK are behaving , "get refusal, etc, etc."

Yes, Gary, I'm delighted to hear that. I am upset that we can't sort our own problems and we have to rely on other people to do it, but I'm glad that's happening.

Q: "Is there a movement for women's rights?"

A: Yes, there is. There are plenty of them, certainly in Israel and certainly in the United States.

Q: "Do men still include a prayer thanking God they're not women?"

A: Some people do, some people don't, and some people interpret it, as Abigail has said, as a recognition of differences. People are creative and we should be. We don't want one pattern for absolutely everybody.

Q: "Why are women trained to be an orthodox rabbi limited in what they can do?"

A: They're only limited in what they can do in the terms that people want to choose to go to them. I have, for example, a sister-in-law in Israel who answers the phone when you call beit din and you want to have a rabbinic opinion. You have them all over the place in Israel. You have women pleading in rabbinic courts. Israel is far more progressive when it comes to women than the diaspora, whether it's England, or Europe, or America. The Orthodox there, for whatever reason, are way behind what's happening in Israel. On the other hand, of course, you've got the extremists, but you've got extremists everywhere in every religion.

Hello. Okay. Thank you, Jules. I appreciate that. Shira Chadasha. Yes, Shira Chadasha was founded, and my sister-in-law and my nieces used to go there. They've moved to different locations. But Shira Chadasha is an example of a woman's minyan in Jerusalem. And there is, and that's my point. In Jerusalem, there's so much more variety than we have in the diaspora, so many more choices you can make, so many places you can go for something different. We are very poor, and getting poorer, in the diaspora for all the... It is so creative, and inventive, and there's so much variety. It's a delight and it makes me very positive about the future. Do you want me to stop or what? I don't know if they...

Anyway, thank you, Jill. Paula, thank you so much. Michigan, in the US.

Hi, welcome from New York.

Q: "Why can't women count in a minyan?"

A: Again, this is simply a tradition that goes back a long time. And there are women minyanim, and there are alternatives, and it's simply a matter of human beings making choices.

Thank you everybody for the nice things you've been saying. Remember... Oh, now I've gone back to the top already. That's crazy. Okay. So let's see if I've missed out anything. Have I still got more questions, Wendy? I don't if I've still got more questions.

- Thanks, Jeremy. I'm sorry I'm having a little bit of problems with my iPad, so I've just jumped onto my phone now. It just seems to have died. I'm not sure. So are you happy in going for an hour and 15 minutes, or an hour and 20 minutes? I want to say thank you very much.

- Yeah, no, I'm happy to go. As long as people still are asking, I'm happy to go on.

- Thank... I dunno, let me have a look because now I've jumped on my phone. Yeah, I'm not sure if---

- [Judi] Wendy, I'm here. If you're having problems, I'm happy to stay until Jeremy feels he's answered all the questions. I'm more than happy to stay on.

- Okay, thanks Jude. Thank you very much.

- So if we lose you, then it's fine. So Jeremy, continue if you like.

- Okay, fine. I've got an interesting question from Bonnie.

Q: "Will you share what shul your niece leads in Israel?"

A: I will go to hear her, I will go to listen to her. But as with any other synagogue, most of the time, I'm not happy praying there. I don't like praying in synagogues where there are choirs. I don't like praying in synagogues where people are talking and making a noise. I don't like praying in synagogues which sound more like churches to me. So I have many things that I... Where do I go to pray? And the truth of the matter is that there are very few places outside of Israel where I actually enjoy praying. For most of my life, I've been a rabbi community where it's been such a strain 'cause people are either nattering, or people are not paying attention, or whatever it is. So I encourage my niece to do whatever works for her.

Q: "Women have... "Are there any female mohels, do you know?"

A: I honestly don't know if there are females. I really wish I knew, but I don't, so I can't answer that one.

"Member of a group in Manchester "and we've been through there..."

Now, I've gone back to the top again, how's that? So let me just see. I'll carry on a bit, but I think I've almost come to the end of it. Yeah, I've dealt with that one.

"Why are women training to be orthodox what they can do?" Jewel Samson. Thank you, Myra.

Thank you, Francine.

Q: "Are you finding the greater Jewish scene in the USA?"

A: Oh, that's an interesting question, scene in the USA. Look, when I was young, we looked to the USA, and USA Jewry, as being the powerhouse of the Jewish world. It had wonderful institutions, academic and social. Its religious life was varied. It was creative. There was thinking going on. I have to say I find Jewish life in America dull and uninspiring. And very few people... There are some people who I'm impressed with, of course there are, but compared to Israel, nothing. It's absolutely nothing in compared to Israel. In the same way in Israel, I can tell you any number of synagogues to go and visit, or groups to listen to, or ways of studying, whether it's secular or non-secular. And even in the time when you had great writers who were Jewish in America, Philip Roth to name just one, you don't have that kind of power in secular American Jewish life. The assimilation is phenomenal.

Until now, I always thought that New York was the next best Jewish city outside of Israel. Now, I have to say with the violence in New York that's going on, I don't feel as secure in New York as I used to. It worries me very much. And I don't see this getting any better because unfortunately the number of people who are coming from backgrounds where they are taught to hate the Jews is increasing. It's right that they should be given refuge, and it's right that people should come from wherever they want to, but this is a problem that's not going to go away unless it's clamped down educationally very, very strongly. The trouble is that in America now, anti-Semitism, and I say this, it's not anti-Zionism, it's anti-Semitism, has reached the main political party. It's already dominating the universities, it's the popular view of so many people.

You just look at the internet and the social media, it's incredibly worrying. Will we survive? Of course, we've survived. We've survived worse before. But in terms of self-defense now, I think we have to take this very seriously, which, again, is a reason that people who doubt the necessity of Israel's existence should think again. But still, as I say, that assimilation rate in this country is something like 65%, and that means 65% are leaving Judaism, leaving any commitment to the religion, and in most cases, not in all, many commitments to Israel, and this is very disturbing.

Where are we? "Enlightening talk," . That's great to see.

Q: "Why are the rules regarding women regarded as Halakha?"

A: Halakha is a general term for a constitution. So just as the American constitution deals with Roe versus Wade, so Halakha deals with every aspect of human life. It's a general term. The trouble is that whereas you can have a vote in the Supreme Court, we don't have a Supreme Court in Judaism. We don't have one final authority. And in one way, I think it's a good thing because the truth is I don't know many rabbis I'd want to give the power to decide for me. I'm glad we have choices. So in the end, you find the rabbinic authority that you identify with, you find the person who resonates with you, and you accept that male or female's guidance. And that's what it is.

"Have no choice in menstruating, "don't have a choice in having wet dreams or not. "Why are these states not acceptable?" I didn't say they're not acceptable. I'm just saying that when you set up an ancient ritual system based on spaces, and based on preparing your body to be in its best state, this becomes a factor. Nowadays, it's not a factor. It hasn't been a factor for 2,000 years. And so, when you look back at these statements in the Torah, you are seeing them in a different context altogether. We are still perfectly sacred now, wherever we are. God is everywhere. God doesn't distinguish between what state we are in. We have to distinguish what state we are in. Are we good enough, or healthy enough, or fit enough, or whatever it is?

Somebody just said there's a female mohel in Toronto, glad to hear that.

Q: "Do you want to comment on the dress modesty obligations on women, not men?"

A: Well again, that's not true. According to orthodoxy, men have to be modest too. That's why Hasidim wear long black coats and they wear tight trousers. Men also have... It's just... It's only in Islam that men can dress any way they want. But look at the Orthodox world. Men are covered up just as much as women. So... And they wear a hat on their head, if not a sheitel on their head. So it's not just modesty. But how you define modesty varies from community to community. In olden days, a glimpse of stocking was looked on as something shocking, now heaven knows anything goes. So it all depends on what community you want to fit in. I don't like wearing black hats, so I don't fit into a black hat community. I do for prayer, I like praying so I can put a tallit over my head, but I don't like wearing hot, heavy hats.

"Do I believe you dealt that?" Thank you so much. "Rashi's daughter was a mohel." Solomon, Toronto, thank you, though.

"Women's surgeons are "an interesting question about ." Yeah, but I gather there are, and I can't see any reason why not. Maxim... Thank you, Sharon. That's really the case. "Google says there ," very good.

Where are we now? Oh, I've gone back to the top again. Let me just see. Rashi's daughters... Oh... Yes, I do, I do. I do, I do, I do. "Did..." "When men still..." Yes, they do. There we go, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. I think that's everything. I can't see any more questions. Can you see if there are?

- [Judi] No, I think that's... We're there, Jeremy. Thank you so much.

- Okay, everybody. So thank you for listening to me, and be around in a couple of weeks time.

- [Judi] We're looking forward to seeing you again, and thank you to everybody who joined us this evening. Take care everyone, bye-bye.

- Bye.