



January 21, 2011      16 *Sh'vat* 5771

Dear Leaders of Israel:

We are writing to support Women of the Wall, and the right of women to raise their voices in prayer at the Kotel. I am writing with the explicit commitment of Rabbi Laurie Katz Braun and Rabbi Sarah Reines, the co-presidents of the Women's Rabbinic Network. The Women's Rabbinic Network is the international support and advocacy organization for women in the Reform rabbinate, and is the only Jewish women's clergy association in the world. We represent 600 women who are Reform rabbis. Many of us have travelled extensively to Israel, and we are consistent supporters of Israel and many of its institutions. It is because of our deep commitment and connection to the State and People of Israel that we are compelled to write to you at this time.

We are an essential part of Klal Yisrael. We are deeply disturbed by the fact that women in Israel have been silenced and not permitted to pray aloud at the Kotel, while men may use their voices as they wish. We feel a sense of disappointment and anger that the harassment (and arrest!) of women praying at the Kotel have been permitted to continue. Respectfully, we must state that it is a *booshah* (an embarrassment) that such a situation exists at our people's holiest site, and we believe the situation is a violation of our people's mission as an "*or lagoyim*." We respectfully submit that the State of Israel should be leading the way in honoring and promoting women's rights, and instead, is doing the opposite.

We respectfully demand equal rights for Women of the Wall and all Jewish women who wish to pray at the Kotel. We respectfully demand a curtailment of the harassment and violence against women which take place at the Kotel. We request as well that the administration of the Kotel consider the needs and sensibilities of all Jews when developing the plans for refurbishing the area of the Kotel. We pray that you will keep in mind the reality that eighty-five percent of world wide Jewry pray with "*kol isha*" raised among them, often in leadership. Yes, there must be a place at the Kotel for those men and women who wish to pray in such a way as to not hear "*kol isha*", but there must also be a place where "*kol isha*" can be raised in prayer.

It is Jerusalem and the Kotel to which we turn in prayer all over the world and in *Eretz Yisrael*. And it is for the sake of Jerusalem and the Kotel that we cannot be silent on this most pressing of communal issues. Please take every step possible to provide for the religious rights and sensibilities of all Jews at our holiest site.

Thank you. *L'Shalom*,

Rabbi Jacqueline Koch Ellenson, Director, Women's Rabbinic Network

International Vice-Chair, Rabbis for Women of the Wall

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