



On the morning of December 1, 1988, a group of approximately 70 women from a variety of Jewish denominations arrived at the Kotel (Western Wall) with a Torah scroll to conduct a *halakhic* (legal according to Jewish law) women's prayer service. As no provisions for Torah reading existed in the women's section of the Kotel, we brought a Torah scroll, stood together, and prayed out loud. Many women and men on the other side of the *mehitzah* (partition separating men and women) began to scream, curse and even threaten us. Despite these events, we managed to complete our Torah reading. Then Kotel Administrator, Rabbi Yehuda Getz, allowed us to continue our service stating that we were not violating *Halakhah* (Jewish Law).

Since that day, we continue to struggle to pray together, out loud, while wearing *tallit* and *tefillin* (phylacteries) and reading from a Torah scroll at the Kotel. For thirty years, we have endured violence and legal battles for this basic right as Jewish women, while mobilizing support from the Israeli and international community.

Some key "snapshot" moments in WOW history:

- On Dec. 31, **1988**, a new regulation is promulgated by the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Justice to "prohibit any religious ceremony at a holy place that is not in accordance with the custom of the holy site and which offends the sensitivities of the worshipers at the place." The penalty for violating this regulation is 6 months in jail and/or a fine. This regulation is still in effect today.
- **2001**: Proposed bill no. 1924 was voted on in the Knesset: "1. The prayer area at the Western plaza shall be divided into a men's section and women's section by a divider, and prayers by men and women in a mixed group shall not be permitted there. 2. No religious ceremony shall be held in the women's section near the Western Wall that includes taking out a Torah scroll and reading from it, blowing the *shofar*, or wearing *tallitot* or *tefillin*. 3. Violators shall be imprisoned for seven years." WOW and ICWOW orchestrated a letter-writing campaign to the prime minister, the justice minister, and the speaker of the Knesset.
- **2004**: On June 4, the Court ruled that, despite the state's claims to the contrary, the Women Of the Wall maintained a legal right to pray at the Western Wall. Nevertheless such right was not without boundaries; the Court ruled that prayer at Robinson's Arch would allow the Women Of the Wall to pray according to their practice "next to the Western Wall."



- **2009:** On Rosh Hodesh Kislev, November. 18, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation demanded that the police stop WOW's prayer services, and in response, the police arrested WOW participant Nofrat Frenkel, a young Israeli medical student. Frenkel was held for several hours, interrogated and charged with illegally wearing a tallit at the Western Wall.
- **2010:** WOW Chairperson Anat Hoffman was arrested in July for carrying a Torah. Hoffman was taken into police custody and interrogated for five hours before being released and banned from the Kotel for 30 days.
- **2012:** Anat Hoffman was arrested while leading prayer at Hadassah's centennial convention. She was held in custody and subjected to violent and aggressive treatment for over twelve hours. She was released and issued a restraining order from the Western Wall for 30 days.
- **2013:** On April 11, 2013, 5 women – Lesley Sachs, Bonnie Riva Ras, Sylvie Rozenbaum, Rabbi Valerie Stessin, and Sharona Kramer were detained, held for questioning and arrested. After seeing all evidence, Judge Sharon Larry Bavly stated that there was no cause for arresting the women, and declared that Women of the Wall are not disturbing the public order with their prayers.
- **2013:** WOW submits a list of conditions for the creation of an equal, fully integrated third section of the Western Wall to Avichai Mandelblit, Israel's Cabinet Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office. A precondition to this document is that Women of the Wall will continue to pray in the women's section until a third section is created and completed to the satisfaction of the multi-denominational women's prayer group.
- **2014:** WOW launches Bat Mitzvah advertising campaign on buses; WOW holds first Bat Mitzvah at the Kotel with a Torah on October 24, 2014. A tiny 200 year-old Torah was brought into the Western Wall under the radar of the authorities. 12-year old Sasha Lutt of Beer Sheva read from the Torah for her Bat Mitzvah ceremony, as her mother Irina Lutt, member of WOW's Executive Board, looked on with pride.
- **2014:** WOW's first Hanukkah candle-lighting service at the Kotel brings over 100 women including prominent Knesset members Tamar Zandberg and Stav Shaffir.
- **2018:** WOW continues gathering women of all Jewish denominations for Rosh Hodesh services, drawing 150-200 women at each event, and attracting thousands of livestream followers/supporters from around the world.

שנות 30 Years of
נחישות Activism
Women of the Wall נשות הכותל