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Inviting women back into the chagim

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There's been a lot of talk on Facebook about women's inclusion – or exclusion – during the chagim. On one hand, there are photos of sukkah's with no women allowed signs and photos of ushpizot posters of great Jewish women to invite into your sukkah.

Traditionally our forefathers have been honored guests in the Sukkah and women have typically been left out, but this is changing. The organization Ritual Well suggests that inviting the seven prophetesses listed in the Talmud as Sukkah guests. JOFA, the organization of Jewish Orthodox feminists, has created specific ritual for inviting our foremothers into our sukkahs. The Women's League for Conservative Judaism has provided a study guide about the Ushpizot to use for informal Sukkah learning.

It is becoming more common to see woman carry lulavim and etrogim on the streets of Jerusalem, or Beer Sheva, but on the train today, I only saw only men.

Friends of mine – both real and virtual – are asking and answering questions about which Jerusalem synagogues allow women to process and dance with Torahs. There are egalitarian synagogues across the religious divide where women are equal partners and Orthodox synagogues where women can celebrate the Torah fully in the women's section, or only if fully covered-up in the women's section, or not at all. Some women are only spectators.

The Masorti movement is once again distributing flags that show women and little girls and not just men and little boys. Joining the procession of other flag bearing children on Simhat Torah was one of the highlights of synagogue life for me on Long Island. The fact that they gave us jelly apples afterwards made me pretty happy too. But I never dared to think that I would ever read from a Torah, process a Torah, or dance with a Torah.

I am the mother of daughters and they have grown up in a different reality. They were raised in an egalitarian synagogue with a woman rabbi at the helm and they both became a bat mitzvah by leading services and reading Torah.

My grandmother taught me how to keep a kosher kitchen and what it means to be an

observant Jewish woman, my mother taught me through her involvement in Sisterhood what it means to be an active member of a synagogue and a Jewish communal leader. But my daughters have learned from my example that Judaism is not an all-boys-club, and that women belong on the bima, in the sukkah, and dancing with a Torah.

This Simhat Torah I will be dancing.

Chag Sameach

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