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**Nishmat HaBayit: A Window into the Successes of
Yoatzot Halacha** **1**

Ezra Schwartz

93Queen: The New Eishes Hayil, Woman of Valor **9**
Na'amit Sturm Nagel

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NISHMAT HABAYIT: A WINDOW INTO THE SUCCESSES OF YOATZOT HALACHA

EZRA SCHWARTZ

The publication of *Nishmat HaBayit*, an excellent *sefer* on *Hilkhot Niddah* (Jewish family purity law) authored by the *Yoatzot Halacha* of Nishmat, is noteworthy both for what it reflects about the institution of *Yoatzot Halacha* and for its positions on particular halakhic issues.¹ This review primarily covers matters of more general concern, and offers comments on specific halakhic positions taken by the volume in an appendix.

It is impossible for me to review *Nishmat HaBayit* without also reviewing the entire enterprise of *Yoatzot Halacha*. In my role as a *shul* rabbi, I have worked closely with various *Yoatzot* since 2011. I have been greatly impressed by the sensitivity they bring to answering *she'eilot* and the comfort with which women of the community are able to approach these intelligent and well-educated women.

Many women are clearly more comfortable posing their intimate questions to another woman rather than asking the rabbi directly. To my mind, this unquestionably improves the quality of the *she'eilah* and *teshuvah* process. As a result, since beginning to work with a *Yoatzet*, the volume of *she'eilot* I receive may have decreased, but the quality of the *she'eilot*, the depth of understanding that comes forward in them, and the detailed information that comes together with each question has only increased. This is due to the fact that *she'eilot* filtered through *Yoatzot Halacha*, as opposed to coming directly from the woman herself, tend to be accompanied by more detailed information.

Hence, I am a strong supporter of *Yoatzot Halacha*. I have delivered *shiurim* to those studying to become *Yoatzot* and personally have benefitted from engaging with them. I deeply admire the knowledge, conscientiousness, and *tzeniut* of the *Yoatzot* whom I have encountered, and I believe *Yoatzot* can be very important role models for our communities, which desperately need female Torah role models.

Yoatzot Halacha represent what large segments of mainstream Modern Orthodoxy perceive as the most accepted form of women's Torah leadership. For this reason, although some in our community (as represented in the [OU Teshuvah](#) of which I was a co-author) are not comfortable with *Yoatzot* for a variety of realistic reasons and [concerns](#), all agree that *Yoatzot* provide a valuable service to our communities.

¹ The author would like to thank Rav Daniel Feldman and Yoatzot Halacha Atara Eis and Dena Block for their helpful comments.

Nishmat HaBayit gives us a window into the type of scholarship and leadership roles which large portions of our mainstream modern Orthodox community deem to be *le-khatehilla*. Hence, reading *Nishmat HaBayit* not only offers dry scholarship and pure Talmud Torah but also a glimpse of what it is about *Yoatzot* that has allowed them to gain such strong support from large segments of our community.

The volume provides genuine information, real sources upon which to base my deep satisfaction with the institution of *Yoatzot*, beyond personal interactions and impressions. Any comments or criticisms I have in this essay merely reflect minor points of detail that are intended in the spirit of *lehagdil torah u-leha'adirah*.

Nishmat HaBayit is not a traditional work of *she'eilot* and *teshuvot* relating to *Hilkhot Niddah* and one who reads this *sefer* expecting to find such a work will largely be disappointed.² Each section in this *sefer* is comprised of three parts: a *she'eilah* (question), a *teshuva* (response) and a *harhavah* (extended analysis). The *she'eilah* and *teshuvah* are quite different from what one would expect from the standard model of each.

Unlike standard *she'eilot u-teshuvot*, which are often impersonal probing essays, the questions presented in *Nishmat HaBayit* are first person accounts.³ One woman discusses her difficulty obtaining clean *bedikot* after miscarriage (#24); another asks about her lack of interest in having sexual relations after childbirth (#26); yet another writes of challenges due to staining that result from her choice of birth control (#42). The questions are not theoretical; they are personal and intimate accounts. The *teshuvot* given to the questions are similarly very personal and are written with great sensitivity. Rather than a discourse weighing various *shittot of posekim*, we read a personalized set of directions addressed to the woman. Often the directions involve clear medical information⁴ and they frequently present practical options for what can be done to avoid this problem in the future. Almost always, they present a brief but clear set of halakhic guidelines.

² Although the Hebrew title page and cover do not assert that *Nishmat HaBayit* is a work of *teshuvot*, the English translation terms the book a work of responsa.

³ A comparison to *Teshuvot Be-Mareh ha-Bazak* of the Eretz Hemdah Institute, which largely are directed at the same community as those who avail themselves of *Yoatzot Halacha*, is instructive. (See especially *Be-Mareh ha-Bazak* vol. 3, *simanim* 115-118.)

The paucity of *she'eilot* related to *niddah* in *Be-Mareh ha-Bazak* is largely, I presume, the result of those who would otherwise ask Eretz Hemdah rabbanim turning to *Yoatzot Halacha* for guidance in matters of *niddah* and fertility. The *teshuvot* in *Be-Mareh ha-Bazak* are far more impersonal and present what the Halakha is in a terse, laconic manner. We are told that experts were consulted in questions of fertility. However in *Nishmat HaBayit* the responders present a more elaborate response and they themselves serve as experts on various medical issues. It is noteworthy that Rav Moshe Ehrenreich the Rosh Kollel of Eretz Hemdah makes precisely this point regarding the sensitivity to the questioner in his approbation to *Nishmat HaBayit*.

⁴ The inclusion of medical information distinguishes *Nishmat HaBayit* from other contemporary works on *Hilkhot Niddah*.

These *teshuvot* differ from classical ones in that they most often do not present new analyses of the *sugyot*, or a careful weighing of different positions among *posekim*. They do not present extensive argumentation rejecting a proof brought to buttress a particular opinion. The essays in *Nishmat HaBayit* read like the advice given by a sensitive and expert rabbi or halakhic adviser with abundant experience who thoughtfully and sensitively advises a congregant, rather than simply and dryly answering her question.

The *harhavah* section, which presents more elaborate explanation, does at first glance resemble traditional *teshuvot*. Notably, *Nishmat HaBayit* is not the product of a single author. Many *Yoatzot* were engaged in the project and each *siman* in the *sefer* identifies its primary author. It is no surprise, then, that the *harhavah* section can vary widely based on the author, as one might expect for a *sefer* of this nature.

Rabbanit Chana Henkin herself authored the most elaborate and detailed *simanim* (see, e.g., #25 and #55). In these *simanim* the *harhavah* most clearly resembles a traditional *teshuva* that begins with the gemara and works through the Rishonim, finally coming to a conclusion based on contemporary *posekim*.⁵ In contrast, the *simanim* authored by the *Yoatzot* often more closely resemble a digest of contemporary *posekim* rather than a full discourse. Of course, there is tremendous value in digests. Halakhic decisors who are looking for the most contemporary information and may not often have access to the burgeoning literature found in Israeli Torah journals will certainly benefit from the summaries of major discussions.⁶

It may be that the reason *Nishmat HaBayit* is not a traditional work of *teshuvot* is fully in line with the mission and purpose of *Yoatzot Halacha*. The *teudah* issued to *Yoatzot* does not describe them as *posekot*; they are, rather, “the first address for women who desire to turn to them in matters of *niddah* and *tevilah*, who receive direction in the path of Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.”⁷ In other words, *Yoatzot* are not intended to be *posekot*—those who themselves decide halakha and weigh in on complicated matters, but the first address one can turn to, if so desired. This framing may contribute to the fact that mainstream Modern Orthodox communities are largely comfortable with *Yoatzot Halacha*.

Some of the most valuable information in this *sefer* relates to previously unpublished positions of leading *rabbanim*. Simply having these positions in print is a major accomplishment; however, there would be real benefit in reading the reasons behind these

⁵ The volume could benefit from more cross referencing throughout. For example, in Rabbanit Henkin’s extensive presentation of *hargashah* discussed in *siman* #25 there is no reference to Rav Wahrhaftig’s unusual position that women today are not *niddot mi-de’oraita* since they do not experience any of the *hargashot* mentioned in *posekim*. Rav Wahrhaftig’s position is mentioned, however, in *siman* #42 note 9, although there is no discussion in *siman* #42 whether, according to Rav Wahrhaftig, blood absent *hargashah* will be treated with the leniencies of *ketamim*.

⁶ Although there is great need for digests and many find this style compelling, my personal preference is for a bit more conceptual analysis or *lomdus*. See my earlier *Lehrhaus* [article](#) on this topic.

⁷ My translation of the text of the *teudah* given to *yoatzot halacha* upon completion of the program.

pesakim. I would be very interested, for example, in understanding why Rav Yaakov Wahrhaftig is only strict regarding bleeding that comes from the uterine wall in cases of placenta previa (see p. 51 n. 15).

Similarly, in cases of necessity (a term left undefined), Rav Wahrhaftig is lenient in the case of a *yoledet* after forty days of gestation when the ultrasound indicates that fetal demise was before forty days,⁸ without explaining his rationale.⁹ We are treated to a number of important *pesakim* given by Rav Yehuda Herzl Henkin as well. (See, e.g., p. 140 n. 93) Hopefully he will have a *refuah sheleimah*, and we will benefit from a more thorough presentation of his positions by reading of his analysis and proofs.

An extremely valuable part of *Nishmat HaBayit* is the section dealing with questions of contraception. Nearly half of this volume (144 out of 305 pages) relates to the general permissibility of family planning, under which circumstances it is permitted, and which methods may be used. In my view, providing such attention to these issues is very appropriate, as the bulk of the more complicated *niddah* questions I am asked relate to questions of staining or bleeding that accompanies contraception.

The authors of this volume clearly follow the approach that a couple should seek the counsel and direction of a religious authority before deciding to go on birth control (#30). Although not referenced in the book, this is the position of Rav Hershel Schachter¹⁰ as opposed to others who call for a more limited rabbinic role in this area.¹¹

The positions taken in *Nishmat HaBayit* in general, and specifically with respect to questions of contraception, are very much within the mainstream range of halakhic positions. This is yet another reason why *Yoatzot Halacha* are becoming increasingly accepted in the mainstream Modern Orthodox community.

It is worth noting, as *Nishmat HaBayit* does in passing (#38, p. 200), that with technological advancement and the emergence of newer methods of oral contraception, which often contain a lower dosage of hormones than previous methods, staining and breakthrough bleeding is only becoming more prevalent for women on the pill. As such, the assumption

⁸ See #22 page 116. I am particularly curious since when I discussed this question with a number of *posekim* I was told to be strict on the matter. Rav Henkin is uncertain regarding this situation. I am curious as to how the *Yoatzot* would decide in a dispute between Rav Henkin and Rav Wahrhaftig. Such disputes are not entirely uncommon.

⁹ It is worth noting that elsewhere in the volume innovative *shitot* of Rav Wahrhaftig are explained. See #39 note 23 where a rationale for Rav Wahrhaftig's position that a woman need concern herself only with the last day of what the package of birth control pills defines as the most likely time for her to receive her period.

¹⁰ See Hershel Schachter, "Halachic Aspects of Family Planning," *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 4 (Fall 1982), 5-32.

¹¹ Moshe Kahn, "The Halakhic Parameters of Delaying Procreation," *Meorot* 8 (2010), p. 72-82.

made by the vast majority of modern day *posekim* that a woman on the pill is a *mesulleket damim* (a woman who is halakhically presumed not to see blood) may be open to challenge, and it may be necessary to update the information with the passage of time.

The book's ranking of halakhic and practical preference for various forms of birth control (#32) is extremely valuable. This volume also contains discussion of some of the newer forms of contraception such as Nuva Ring (#48,#49), female condoms (#33, p. 184), the morning-after pill (#36), and the sponge (#34 p. 186). These chapters will certainly be of tremendous value to all those who are asked questions regarding the permissibility of contraception.

Finally, the most important part of the *sefer* may very well be the medical appendices in the back. These appendices, authored by *Yoetzet Halacha* Deena Zimmerman, herself a medical doctor and the author of a highly recommended popular work on *Hilkhos Niddah*,¹² present extremely valuable information in a clear and precise way. The decision not to print a picture of female anatomy in the *sefer* but instead (at p. 310) to send the reader to a website that has that information seems to be a proper choice and is in line with the *Yoatzot's* overall commitment to *tzeniut*. The section describing methods of birth control is extremely helpful, although this section would be better served if it had more English translations.

There are a few things I would like to see from future editions of *Nishmat HaBayit*, to further improve an already excellent work. At times the reader is not certain who authored particular *sefarim* cited in the text. The *mafteah* (index) in the back of the *sefer* merely lists the author's name, but does not provide the valuable information regarding when and where the author lived.

Moreover, since many technical terms are presented, a glossary translating these terms into English could be of tremendous benefit for the English-speaking public. Of course, a full English translation of the work is a major desideratum. I can only hope that future volumes of *Nishmat HaBayit* appear and cover major topics that are not discussed in this volume. Specifically, I await a volume that discusses *harkhakot*, *bedikot*, *vesatot*, infertility, and questions of *hatzitza* and *tevilah*.

All in all, this is a wonderful volume. It properly attests to the contributions that knowledgeable women can make to Torah. These women offer deep sensitivity, as well as thorough knowledge of both the Halakhic and medical aspects of *niddah*. It is no wonder that *Yoatzot Halacha* can play such an important and appropriate role in our communities.

Appendix

¹² See Deena Zimmerman, *A Lifetime Companion to the Laws of Jewish Family Life* (Urim Publishers, Third Edition, 2011).

Beyond the general comments regarding the book and its value, this appendix considers the halakhic content of this *sefer* closely and offers a few comments which I believe are important *le-halakhah*.

First, I would like to focus on two issues regarding *harkhakot* (distancing between husband and wife during *niddah*) which come up in this *sefer*. The book summarizes an extensive discussion in *posekim* as to the permissibility of parents passing a child during the *niddah* period,¹³ but it leaves out the notable position of Rav Mordechai Willig permitting passing a child whom *halakha* deems to be a *holeh she-ein bo sakana*.¹⁴

Another issue the *sefer* discusses in relation to *harkhakot* is that of a husband assisting in the delivery room (#13). This poses a potential problem since the husband is not permitted to gaze at his wife's covered parts once she becomes a *niddah*, nor touch her. *Nishmat HaBayit* cites Rav Yehuda Herzl Henkin that when a woman is concerned about her husband being absent from the delivery room the husband is obligated to be there. Interestingly, Rav Dov Lior in his *haskama* to *Nishmat HaBayit* believes that presence of the husband in the delivery room and his possibility of helping his wife during labor is "something that came from America and does not accord with the traditional modes of *tzeniut* among Am Yisrael."

The approach of *Nishmat HaBayit* allowing for the husband to be present during labor and delivery is, however, certainly well-founded and is based on the position of Rav Moshe Feinstein.¹⁵ Surprisingly, *Nishmat HaBayit* goes so far as to present the position of Rav Shlomo Dichovsky that a husband may wear surgical gloves and physically assist his wife during labor, which has largely been rejected by major *posekim*.

Although this volume does not focus on *ketamim*, it does refer to one noteworthy aspect of *ketamim*. *Nishmat HaBayit* presents the minimum size of a *ketem* which renders a woman *tamei* as approximately the size of an Israeli *shekel*,¹⁶ while in the US the standard measurement is a penny.¹⁷ The *shekel* is roughly the same diameter as a US dime, approximately 18 mm diameter, while a penny is approximately 19 mm diameter. It may well be that in Israel the *shekel* is the best approximation for the size of a *ketem*, as the 10 *agora* coin has a diameter of 22 millimeters and according to the accepted opinions is larger than

¹³ See #29. An interesting but unsourced point is made in this *siman*, that the *minhag* of *kvatter* at a *brit milah* developed as a way of ensuring that the parents do not pass the baby directly from one to the other.

¹⁴ See *Toharat ha-Kodesh*, p. 314. This is particularly striking since Rabbi Willig is cited in #29 n. 25. It is possible that the authors of this volume failed to notice the significant comments of RIETS Roshei Yeshiva in the back of *Toharat ha-Kodesh*.

¹⁵ *Iggerot Moshe* vol. 2 no. 75. However, Rav Moshe goes even further than Rav Yehuda Herzl Henkin and states that even if the wife does not see any need for the husband to be present there is no *issur*. Surprisingly, this teshuva is not cited in the text.

¹⁶ See #46 page 233.

¹⁷ See *Baddei ha-Shulhan*, *millum* 190:53. Even Israeli *posekim* largely accept the 19 mm shiur. See *Piskei Teshuvot*, Yerushalayim 2007 p. 230 n. 67 in the name of Rav Elyashiv.

the acceptable size. Nonetheless, *Nishmat HaBayit* would have been better served referring to a US penny. (I am fairly certain that even Israelis know what a penny is.)

At times, it is hard to understand how a particular conclusion is arrived at. In siman #15, *Nishmat Avraham* is quoted that it is unheard of for a woman to undergo a Cesarean section and not have any vaginal bleeding, while the next sentence asserts that if there is no vaginal bleeding she remains *tehorah*. If medical evidence exists that today some women undergo C sections without seeing even a drop of blood, that should be cited.

This is even more noteworthy since the authors of this volume follow modern medical knowledge over the past prior consensus of *posekim*. For example, in the case of stripping of the membranes, the consensus of the *posekim* is that it renders a woman a *niddah*. However, here the author writes that not all scenarios of stripping the membranes are equal and a doctor should be consulted on each particular case (#11).

Rav Moshe Feinstein was of the opinion that once a woman tests positive for pregnancy she need not be concerned with *vesatot*. The author tells us that although Rav Moshe's position is in the minority, in a case of urgency, such as when her husband is going away for a month of reserve army duty, his position may be followed, as one may follow minority positions in extenuating circumstances (#2). I am concerned by this presentation, as the definition of extenuating circumstances (*she'at ha-dehak*) is a very broad topic that has implications for many areas of halacha.¹⁸ I would generally be hesitant to put into print leniencies that apply in a *she'at ha-dehak*, given the concern that this position can open a Pandora's box that may, God forbid, lead to excessive and unfounded leniencies.

To be clear, I am not questioning the legitimacy of this ruling. However, I am contending that we would be better served by a different analysis that might arrive at the same *pesak*. In fact, such an alternative analysis is already alluded to in the footnotes (n. 18), which refer to *posekim* who permit having relations during a time immediately prior to a woman's period when her husband is about to embark on a journey. If this is a critical component of this particular ruling it should be spelled out in greater detail.

Additionally, the *sefer* does not clarify which particular *veset* we are dealing with: Is the issue at hand a *veset kavua*, *eino kavua*, or *onah beinonit*? Is the case one in which the couple could only be together on the actual *onat ha-perishah*, or is the issue that they could be together after the *onat ha-perishah* and the woman is merely concerned that she will become *asurah* if she undertakes a *bedikah*. If the issue is the latter scenario, and the case at hand is a *veset she-eino*

¹⁸ See *Shabat ha-Aretz*, introduction, ch. 10. I delivered a *shiur* to aspiring *Yoatzot Halacha* on how one can assess *she'at ha-dehak* specifically with respect to *niddah* issues a number of years ago. The *shiur* can be accessed [here](#).

kavua, there is certainly room to be lenient based on the position of the Beit Yosef that one need not do *bedikah* even *le-khatehillah* for a *veset she-eino kavua*.¹⁹

Perhaps the most common and challenging question that arises in *hilkhot niddah* is how one distinguishes between a flow and a stain. It is widely assumed that any *niddah* flow is a *de-orayta* concern, whereas a stain is not, and its repercussions can be averted with the leniencies of *ketamim*. This issue is discussed by *Nishmat HaBayit* (#42), but it does not provide a precise definition of what is considered a flow.

At times, even the *harhavah* section could benefit from more information. For example, in a discussion of a woman who needs to go to the *mikveh* while pregnant, we are correctly told that the woman may shower rather than bathe as part of her *hafifah* process and that she may dip a single time rather than the multiple times Ashkenazic women usually dip (#8). However, no clear guidance is provided as to how long she should spend in the shower as part of her *hafifah* process, nor are we told when she should recite a *berakha* if she decides to immerse only a single time.

In sum, as with any work of halakha, there is legitimate room to question specific positions and bring larger issues to the fore. My hope is that those who read *Nishmat HaBayit* will similarly contribute to this conversation *lehagdil Torah u-le-ha'adirah*.

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¹⁹ This is in fact the conclusion of Rav Mordechai Willig—see *Toharat ha-Kodesh*, p. 314. Rav Willig is quoted differently in *Nishmat HaBayit* #55 page 271-272. However the citation in *Nishmat HaBayit* does not seem to conform with Rav Willig's conclusion. If the authors want to rule leniently only because of the pregnancy, this should be stated explicitly after referencing the discussion in #55.

93QUEEN: THE NEW EISHES HAYIL, WOMAN OF VALOR

NA'AMIT STURM NAGEL

Judge Ruchie Freier, the founder of the first all-women's Hasidic ambulance corps and the first Hasidic female judge, refuses to call herself a feminist. Yet after watching *93Queen*, a documentary in which she stars, viewers will understand why others consistently try to pin that label on her. *93Queen* tracks Freier's struggle to create a reality in which Hasidic women who find themselves in medical emergencies can finally choose to have a female Emergency Medical Technician, rather than an EMT from the all-male Orthodox ambulance corps, Hatzolah. She and her group of female Hasidic volunteers are indefatigable in the face of every roadblock put in their path.

The film opens a window into the cloistered world of Borough Park, Brooklyn, and sheds light on the challenges faced by any kind of change to gender roles. The all-male Hasidic ambulance corps tries to thwart their launch, the rabbis won't give them permission (a *haskamah*) for the project, and—worst of all—fellow women ostracize them because they find the idea of women breaking out of their traditional roles threatening to their way of life. But when the volunteers are interviewed on Chazaq radio, the host emphatically clarifies: “you shouldn't think they are feminists. They are very, very far from that.”

Watching *93Queen*—so called because the official call sign for Ezras Nashim, the female ambulance group, was “93-Queen”—I was fascinated, but I found myself disappointed in Freier's disinclination to identify with the term that so clearly seems to define her. Throughout the film that charts the challenges and ultimate foundation of Ezras Nashim, the F-word is noticeably loaded.

Interestingly, the challenge Freier has talking about Feminism or equality is deeply connected to the challenges of Ezras Nashim portrayed in this film. The women who are part of the new ambulance corps are trying to straddle an incredibly fine line. The subjects do not want to be seen as doing something progressive; progressivism has negative connotations in their traditional world. These women would be horrified if someone put them in the same category as the pioneers who spearheaded the shift to women studying Gemara or the more recent exploding trend of Orthodox women becoming Yoatzot Halacha and even clergy. Despite their best efforts, however, the film is a testament to trailblazing women who break down barriers to enter a field dominated by men. The women who join the ambulance corps have mostly never been paramedics, nor have they challenged rabbinic authority. Yet they believe in their mission and are unabashed about their goals. As Freier says: “[the Rabbis] think women aren't fast enough, strong enough, or smart enough...and I think we are.” Watching Freier and the heroic women of Ezras Nashim challenge the status quo in the Hasidic community makes their story a testament to female perseverance.

The film does a beautiful job of following the challenges the women face, with the camera focusing on physical movement as a metaphor for social movement. *93Queen* opens with images of moving trains, school buses, cars, and eclectic groups of people using crosswalks. The scene highlights how the Hasidic community exists in the modern world: an island of unnatural rigidity in a sea of mobility. At one point in the film Ezras Nashim actually finds

their car with a boot on it when someone tries to sabotage the group. Once Ezras Nashim actually does get off the ground Freier ironically sits in her car and says: “Okay, now let’s move.” The idea of movement within such a constricted community, both literally and figuratively, is what the film is about.

The director of *93Queen*, Paula Eiselt, is one of the few Orthodox female filmmakers making movies today. Her background makes her uniquely positioned to find creative ways of forcing the viewer to think about different layers of issues around gender roles in the Hasidic community. The music in *93Queen*, for example, is mesmerizing and clearly was chosen carefully. The singer, Perl Wolfe, is part of the band Bulletproof Stockings, an all-women Hasidic rock band formed in Crown Heights, New York. Wolfe is a vanguard herself, and like Freier, has found creative ways to expand the traditional range of careers open to Hasidic Jewish women within the bounds of Halakha. She has a hypnotic voice and engages in a form of liturgical scattling with klezmer-like music accompanying her. The verses Wolfe sings are strategically placed by Eiselt. This consideration is evident when a verse from the High Holiday services: “*anu banekha, ve-atah avinu*”—we are your sons and you are our father—is sung during a scene when the women are struggling in a man’s world, reminding the viewer that even the language of prayer excludes women. The irony is that none of the men in the film would even be allowed to hear Wolfe’s vocal solo because of the laws of *kol ishah*.

While the film highlights the importance of progress in finding new roles for Orthodox Jewish women, it also reminds us that often we move two steps forward only to move one step back. For example, Ezras Nashim is so worried about pleasing the rabbis that it will not allow single women to join its ambulance corps. In a fraught moment in the film a young girl with three years of EMT experience, which is more than almost all of the women in Ezras Nashim, is turned away because she is unmarried. At another point in the film, when Freier campaigns to be the first female Hasidic judge of city courts, she prints two separate fliers: one for women with pictures of her displayed, and one for men without her face, so that they can elect her without having to look her in the eyes. The final words on the soundtrack of the film are Perl Wolfe singing “*eishes hayil*,” the woman of valour, a song that glorifies the power of women, but mostly in the context of taking care of their husbands and households rather than as independent people.

Yet, this film does rightfully glorify these women’s devotion to their husbands, family, and God. One can’t help but be impressed watching the many shots of Freier braiding *challahs* and cooking for Shabbat while simultaneously stuffing envelopes for an Ezras Nashim fundraiser and taking emergency phone calls. When Ezras Nashim is at a low point, Freier’s gefilte fish is shown burning on the stove. Though the symbolism is not lost on the viewer, Freier is unfazed; she continues cooking and working, balancing it all. Later, in one of the most beautiful moments in the film, a group of Ezras Nashim volunteers pack into a van in the hopes that they will get a *haskamah* from an important rebbe (spoiler: he says no). Throughout the car ride there are close ups of the women poring over *tehillim* books with their iPhones as lights, reminding the viewers that for them this whole endeavor is about fulfilling the ancient word of God.

These shots of the women of Ezras Nashim, especially when highlighting the volunteers’ mundane daily life, were the most fascinating part of the film. The fluidity with which the women raise their children, cook, clean and dedicate themselves to being EMTs is

inspiring—feminists or not. The movie is beautifully shot and Eisalt is an expert storyteller, keeping the viewers' attention throughout the hour and a half film. The many great shots of buying *challah*, braiding *challah*, baking *challah*, and freezing *challah* alone make the movie worth it.

Some of the last sounds one is left with at the end of the film are from Wolfe's bluesy rendition of "*eishes hayil*"—a song traditionally sung by a man to his wife—now being sung by a woman daring to sing her own praise. By the end of *93Queen*, viewers are on board with Yitty Mandel, the Ezras Nashim coordinator: "There is nothing a man can do that a woman can't do better." Maybe this film is actually not a feminist film; I'm not sure if it is up to subject or the viewer to decide. But as Ruchie Freier says near the end of the movie to those trying to pin her down as a feminist: "You can't narrow me down to a few specific words. It doesn't work with me." While I still believe she is a feminist, I would be hard-pressed to disagree with that.

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