

## Some Aspects of Life as the Wife of a Hazzan<sup>1</sup>

### Chair:

;... the positive side of being a *hazzante*<sup>2</sup> is most pleasant. Being a *hazzante* carries with it unusual privileges. Like being an honored guest at all important functions which take place in the synagogue which you must grace with charm and dignity. Being a *hazzante* implies that you are concerned with the welfare and interested in the health of all your congregants. Each one of whom looks upon you as a special friend and is doubly flattered if you are a personal friend. Being a *hazzante* is often an open door to your own role as a civic leader, because by virtue of association with your husband, your name carries with it the additional aura of his position. Being a *hazzante* is an inducement to explore your own talents and develop them more fully, since a *hazzante* is expected to be above the ordinary, anyway. After all, being a *hazzante* means that your responsibility at all times is to raise the status of the cantor, your husband. So you see, it's not so bad.

Our speaker is a man who solves problems. One of Dr. Jack H Bloom's particular interests is his concern for the psychology of the clergy and the problems they have, of living as clergymen, in the community. Today, he will also discuss the psychology of the clergyman's wife and her problems, in the synagogue and community.

Dr. Jack H Bloom:

Thank you. What I am looking forward to this morning is that we are going to have a little more time. After I finish speaking we will be able to open this up for some dialogue, questions and sharing between us and that will help me get more data from you and will help to move the discussion, so it will be more useful to you, than simply what I have to say.

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<sup>1</sup> Edited version of the transcript. Mrs. Meisels will be referred to as Chair, Jack H Bloom as JHB, and Questioners as Woman #1 etc.

<sup>2</sup> Hazzante in this context means the wife of a Hazzan (a Cantor). 's wife) This was at the very beginning of egalitarianism in the Conservative movement and reflects that time and place. So here the antiquarian word Clergyman will be used, as it was then.

Yesterday morning<sup>3</sup> with your husbands, I dealt with the fact that in terms of the personal life of the clergyman, being a walking, talking living symbol, a symbolic exemplar of the very best we're all supposed to be is probably the crucial factor that determines, not only what his professional career is like, but also more importantly, what his emotional and personal life is like. All of you who married *hazzanim*, sensed in some way that in important ways your life as a clergyman's wife is somehow different than it would have been had you married a man who did almost anything else.

The closest experience I've had with someone who reverberated to what it was like to be a clergyman's wife was, oddly enough, the wife of the First Selectman of Fairfield, Conn. In my previous life, when I was the Rabbi of Congregation Beth El, I got to know the First Selectman, John Sullivan and his wife Mary and my wife shared what it was like to be a First Selectman's wife. Mary Sullivan shared with us what it was like to have to go to all of these affairs, to have to smile, have to recognize people, do all that kind of thing and how sometimes she wished that her husband, who was the only Democrat elected in Fairfield, in probably two centuries, and had now been First Selectman for 17 or 18 years, running and winning every second year, how she sometimes wished he would have stayed behind the counter in their florist shop and never become a politician. Somehow you know, as Mary knew, that having married a clergyman, your life is different than it would have been had you not married a clergyman.

To go to one extreme of the spectrum, there's a Reform *rebbitzen*<sup>4</sup> who maintains;

"I married a man, not a rabbi. I am basically a woman and not a rebbitzen. If my husband gives me what I need as a woman, OK"  
"What he does as a rabbi is his business. What he does for me as a woman, is my business." That's one end of the spectrum and some wives of clergymen try to deal with it that way. But in no way, is it as simple as all that.

The other end of the spectrum might come from this description by a

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<sup>3</sup> At a session for the Cantors at the same convention. May 10,1976

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi's wife.

Christian author, in a Christian book, of what the minister's wife is supposed to be like. I'd like you to hear it, since it is the other end of the spectrum from the woman who said, "I married a man, not his career." Some of the things will reverberate from what you have already heard, from what your own life experience is:

"The ideal minister's wife means accepting his career, realizing that she has married, not only a man, but in a sense, the Church. She has chosen, whether she realizes it or not, a way of life, as well as a marriage mate. The way of life, involves her husband's belonging to the congregation, as well as to her and the children. If she fails to accept and to respect her husband's complete dedication to the ministry then jealousy and resentment will inevitably arise. She must come to accept that her husband is shared property and that she is to set an example for others, in church attendance and participation, in spiritual discernment and in radiant, contagious face."

Take a deep breath after that. When you said, "yes" and accepted the marriage ring, you also took on a heavy enough burden. I think that the woman who thinks the first, that she married only a man and not a rabbi, or a man and not a *hazzan*, knows for sure that it ain't by any means, necessarily so. The woman who takes on the second definition has also taken on a burden that will be too hard to carry. Because there is one thing, that I believe, is true. When you've married a clergyman, you've kind of gotten more than you have bargained for. Someone shared yesterday, how you feel when you don't know that someone's been in the hospital, had a baby, an event sad or glad in their lives, etc., and you haven't wished them well, haven't done the "cantorina" kind of thing, and your husband gets demerits for that. When he does that, it's his professional job, to be the professional lover, he gets credits for that. The difficulty with the clergyman's wife is that she is expected to do that, but her credits and demerits are only secondary. She did not make that bargain with the congregation. She's expected to do that. If she gets some credits, it's nice, but it may not necessarily be what she bargained for. I think it's true, to some extent, that the clergyman's wife married both, the man and a symbol. What I want to deal with this morning is what are the implications of being a symbol's wife.

I don't think it matters very much, incidentally, what you do in the

congregation. I don't think it matters very much whether you are a *kochlefel*<sup>5</sup> or you stay private and out of it. The fact of the matter is, that being married to a walking, talking symbol of Jewish life, is going to have an affect on your marriage and on your family. There are two major areas that are intertwined in causing this effect.

Number one is the fact that your husband is expected to be a public symbol of a special, caring, loving man and that because of his symbolic exemplarhood he is expected, to have a special relationship with you and your family. The other side of that, intertwined in my thinking in that, for the clergyman himself, for the clergyman and his wife and for the clergyman, his wife and his family, the gap and/or boundary between public and private, is a very dangerous, hard boundary to protect. There is a sociologist by the name of Erving Goffman,<sup>6</sup> who writes about backstage areas and that it's what happens in the backstage area in which people can let their hair down that is vital to attend to. What is taking place in the kitchen in Grossingers<sup>7</sup> as they prepare my lox and onions omelet, do they say "that guy out there is impossible, he's been bugging me, it's impossible, how can I deal with the people at that table, the people at that table are impossible." That goes on in the backstage area. But when they come out, they are all smiles, because that's the front stage area and we expect that. As long as they come out and smile at us, give us the service we feel we deserve and do it fast and graciously, we're fine.

For the clergyman, his wife and family, the backstage area is a very vulnerable area. It's one that you do your best to protect.

To some extent, the gap between public and private almost doesn't exist. If there is any kind of third party present, whatever you do, becomes virtually in the public domain and is part of that whole symbolic exemplarhood thing. So that a lot of things, which in an ordinary marriage would be considered private, between husband and wife and family, are for you, public issues and that puts extra pressure into the marriage, extra tension, things that have to be dealt with, There's no way around them.

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<sup>5</sup> Yiddish idiom; Lit-cooking spoon. Idiomatically-One who gets involved in just about everything.

<sup>6</sup> Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> Where this conference was taking place.

Let me give you some examples from the research that I did. Some of them will ring bells, some will not. In this case, I worked with rabbis but I think it applies as well to other clergymen and their wives.

One rabbi said,

..."my wife does not keep kosher outside the home. She would love not to keep kosher inside the home. I do keep kosher inside the home and at one time it was a great issue between us. I felt very guilty about it" (rabbi talking) and I said, "What are people going to say about it. I was very tormented about the decision of my wife not to keep kosher. As a matter of fact, I accepted it as a personal failure. If I could not convince her, how could I convince others? Saying I'm only human doesn't help very much. There are certain standards of religious behavior that a congregation expects not only of the rabbi, but also of the rabbi's family. I have to maintain a Jewish home and a Jewish lifestyle."

That's in one area. All I am saying in these examples, is that for the relationship between the clergyman and his wife, since he stands for certain ideas, other things are going to be tossed into the marital pot, which are not tossed into the marital pot in almost any other relationship. Someone here mentioned clothes. One rabbi reports to me:

"We had a whole big thing in this congregation (this had to be 3-4 years ago) because of the fact that my wife wears pantsuits, on Shabbes morning. My religious committee had taken a position against it. They printed an article, in the synagogue bulletin, and I had to go and print a retraction. That she was, at least, coming to *shule*<sup>8</sup>, but the fact that what she wore became an issue publicly, meant that her private life was no longer private, simply because she happened to be married to the rabbi. What she did became a public issue, put into print in the congregation, everyone read between the lines, and the religious committee wrote one policy and the rabbi had to write a retraction and that again goes into the marital pot and changes what happens."

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<sup>8</sup> Colloquial for synagogue.

My own *rebbitzen* who, who comes to *shule* late, comes in jeans and I notice it. That's all I'm saying. I don't have any objections. I love her. She's a nice gal. I notice it.<sup>9</sup>

I am saying that if anyone else did that. it would be a private matter. It would not be a public matter. It would not reflect on her husband, it would not become an issue. With her, it's a public matter. That becomes a major area of conflict--the fact that you are intertwined with your husband, in terms of his symbolic role and that to some extent, laymen do expect the clergyman's family to behave in a certain way, because that family is seen as an exemplar family. There is no absolutely correct way that you can deal with it. You have to deal with it one way or another. I'm not going to tell you how to deal with it--that I can't do. I will tell you some things I think about it, but you are going to have to deal with that kind of thing.

Another rabbi said (and you tell me in what other family this would be an issue):

“My children ride their bicycles on Shabbat and I don't mind. I do know that in some communities (from my colleagues) that children have sometimes been criticized, or the rabbi has been criticized, for having the children do something on Shabbat. I have not been confronted with this, although my children do ride their bicycles on Shabbat. Although, if they were teenagers or adults, it would be something where that would cause public comment. But none of this is bothering me.”

He's lucky he's in a congregation where nothing is bothering him, but he's talking about it and no other man, no other family would have to be discussing that issue, if they decide to let their kids ride, or to decide not to let their kids ride. Their kids' riding is a public issue only for the clergyman. Then he comments how nicely his wife fits into the community and goes on to talk how she does and behaves appropriately, so that there is not any public thing. It may not be bothering him, but there is nobody else who would talk about that. No

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<sup>9</sup> It's interesting I noted this since I am not in the pulpit any more--it's a peculiar thing because I found myself responding like a layman. It's very weird. Shame on me! If you ever happen to change positions, it will happen with you. It's a very weird kind of feeling. I have to say to myself, "Bloom, keep your mouth shut."

one else would raise that kind of issue.

That is input into that marital relationship. That husband and wife have to deal with that; the family has to deal with that. As I mentioned yesterday, it's really in this profession that the clergyman's public image and symbolhood is a hostage to what his wife and his family do. The crucial part of those expectations is, that how the clergyman relates to his wife and how the clergyman relates to his family, and that they demonstrate an exemplary relationship and that their relationship with the family is exemplary, are also part of the issue. At any point, the extent to which you and your husband keep in mind what the congregation is going to think about your behavior is going to be an issue that you are going to have to deal with. There is reality, the fact that the congregation does measure your behavior--no way around that. You and your husband are going to have to deal with that on some level, and are going to have to work something out. I have a hunch that your position is more stretchable than you think it is, but it is an issue that you are going to have to deal with.

It really doesn't matter what the decision is. Not all wives have to deal with these issues. Not all families do deal with these kinds of things. How do you deal with the kid who wants to go to the basketball game Friday night? You can't say that it's not an issue. It is an issue. A part of the thing is that the exemplar is hostage to you his wife, to your behavior and the two of you are hostage to what his your kids do.

Let me get on to a couple of other areas. The only way that laity ultimately measures the success of clergy exemplarhood is not by how a man is in the pulpit but how he is perceived to be in private. Therefore, what one does in private becomes the ultimate guide to measuring how one really is. People are always curious about that. What happens in the living room, the pillow talk in the bedroom, the sharing of the day around the kitchen table, what happens in these venues, becomes the ultimate measure of whether a person is really sensitive, really caring, really loving.

There are some other areas where being a clergyman's wife affects you. I want to tell a story to begin it: For ten years in the congregation I served, my wife and I had the following conversation, maybe twenty times a year: We'd come home on a Saturday night, we'd been out with

another couple. At that time, we considered ourselves a young couple. We'd say, "Aren't they nice? We had a lovely time, tonight. Do you think they could be our friends?" Twenty times a year we repeated the same words. Those couples treated us with respect and often affection. We love you rabbi, you're great with the kids, that was a great talk. But they never became our friends. I'm thinking of one couple, Lenny and Marcia Meyers, originally from Providence Rhode Island. We met with them fairly often during the ten years. Could they be friends? When we left the pulpit and when we got back from Israel, we became friends with Lenny and Marcia. We asked them, "During those ten years we thought you could be our friends, but it never happened." They leveled with us. They said, "We never invited you on a Saturday night because we thought you would be a wet blanket on the party." I was and despite knowing a great deal about clergy remain astonished that they didn't invite us Saturday night I could be less of a wet blanket than they imagined, But, it didn't matter who I was, or what I did. The fact of the matter is that when I didn't get invited, Meryl also didn't get invited. The same kind of shifting of gears that happens with *baalebatim*<sup>10</sup> happens with the *hazzante* as well as the *rebbitzen*. That sense of being set apart, of being people who are other and different in the community, that is a reality and I don't think you're going to be able to break that reality. You may be able to find friends outside of the congregation. My experience is that this is a reality of congregational life. A lot of our Jews form friendships in the congregation. That's how they happen to join congregation A instead of congregation B. For you, every friendship in the congregation is a semi-professional one. You are the professional friend. That is what gives you access, as Mrs. Meisels said, it's also what keeps you apart. You are also expected to go to a lot of congregational functions. That cuts down your options of what to do Saturday night. It may be that you worked out something with that, but you also do pay a price for that. You are a semi-professional friend and that is very different from being a friend and having the choices that other people have.

Another factor that is different for clergymen's wives than for any others is the fact that your husband works when others are off. You are out of sync with the rest of society. Your husband works when others

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<sup>10</sup> Congregants

are relaxing. For me, going to *shule* now, is what I do *Shabbes*<sup>11</sup> morning to relax. If I don't go to *shule*, it's also OK I go, but Leibel is working *Shabbes* morning. The fact that your husband's work is other people's recreation has a profound effect on your own life. If you are working at a regular profession, and you have your own career, weekends and evenings are likely your time away from work. Being married to clergy means essentially that when you are available, he's not. Even when you don't have your own profession, it means that at those times when the kids are around, he is not available. Daddy is gone; your husband is out to a meeting. For me now, I can decide--do I go to the board meeting or do I not go. The rabbi doesn't have that option. The *hazzan* also works while others are relaxing. That becomes hard to do, to live a regular life when your husband is gone so much of the time Especially given that is the time when other husbands and fathers are around. That may account for the fact that a lot of people in this profession become synagogue devotees because if you are a *kochlefel*, I don't mean that in a negative sense, then you are also working at the same time. That can sometimes work out. That's fine for those women for whom that's comfortable, a good spot to be. Many clergy wives become the semi-professional, active in the *shule*, also working on Sunday morning, or at other times. That sometimes works out very well and is quite understandable. That happens to therapists, too. A lot of therapists have night hours and a lot of wives end up working with the husbands doing couples therapy--the one good way of being with the husband and sharing the life. I'm not a fan of that, but others are OK doing it that way.

Then you have the problem when something in the family of the synagogue, which to some extent is your husband's other family, happens, which interferes with your family. When you have a family picnic planned and they have a funeral. When you have a Sunday off and you want to go to New York, or some place, and there's a wedding--someone else's personal thing. Your husband is a member of your family but he's also some kind of extra familial member of another family. Therefore, they expect him there. "After all, *Hazzan*, you "*bar-mitzvahed*" me, you were at my *bris*<sup>12</sup>--how could you not be at my wedding:" The fact that you want to go to your own family thing that

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<sup>11</sup> Yiddish for Sabbath

<sup>12</sup> The circumcision ceremony at which an eight-day-old boy is entered into the covenant.

day, or do something with your own family, you have to learn to work around that. That also puts strain and another issue into the marital pot.

The next one you're not going to like. It's absolutely true. The fact of the matter is, and you're going to argue with this, that no matter how long you are in a community, if you are a professional, or a professional's wife, or the professional's family, you do not belong in that community; your roots are not really in that community. I can document that with some very painful stories--you do not really have roots in that community. I did not really become part of Fairfield and Bridgeport all the ten years I was there. I did not really belong there, until I was outside being a rabbi and became, functionally from their point of view, a layman. Now, all of a sudden, I am part of that community. When you are hired, when your husband is hired to be in one of those paid positions, you are in the community, you are not of it.

There are some very painful stories, some that people here can attest to--of *rebbitzin* widows, where the husband has died, and it becomes very clear, that the remaining partner is not part of the community. That is painful.

A very interesting thing occurs in the rabbinate. I will share this with you. I don't know if it is true with your husbands, but the data I have from the rabbinate shows that for rabbis, their closest friends are and remain people from whom they are separated by great distance. People with whom they went to school. I can let my hair down with Joel Zaiman, who some of you know. He's two hours away from me in Providence Rhode Island. I see Joel very seldom. He remains a close friend over the years. There is Morty Tutnauer who lives in Israel--a good friend of mine from the Seminary. He remains a close friend. That is not true in any other profession. You will not hear any lawyer, any doctor, any engineer saying that "my truly close friend is someone who has been in Phoenix, Arizona for the last ten years." That is an anomaly and I bet that for your husbands and yourselves, the people with whom you can let your hair down most easily are other *hazzanim*, other *hazzantes*. That is most unusual. That is evidence of the fact that we really do never belong. That's a real problem. A member is a member. Whether you pay dues or not is not the issue. You are not a member of that congregation or that community.

The next is that, your loyalty is always on view. When we need a shrink in the family to do family therapy with us, the family never suggests, "Daddy, why don't you do family therapy with us?" We say, "who can we get to work out the issues going on between me and my little one, or my two daughters?" No doctor's wife or doctor's family go to their father for treatment. That's unheard of. We say that a man, who is his own lawyer~ is a damn fool. The only profession in which you, as the wife of a clergyman, are expected to get your religious services from the man who is your husband is really the clergyman's wife. What would happen if you decided, I want to be a religious Jewess and I want to have someone else be my rabbi, someone else be my hazzan, and you decided to go to the other *shule*.? There would be hell to pay. Yet, this is the only profession in which people do not understand that one does not take care of those kinds of spiritual needs, or medical needs, or psychological needs within the family. One of the rabbis in my program, it's beyond our conception that it should be done, said, that one of the reasons that he left some town that he was in, is that he wouldn't have his daughter go to his own synagogue's religious school. They lived out of town and he was in Hillel when he became the rabbi there. So they lived out of the community and wouldn't move. He built his own home and when the time came for religious school, he wouldn't take his daughter to the religious school in his synagogue, because he wanted that separation a long time ago. Could you imagine that, incidentally? If you have a day school, yes, or a community school, but if you had a synagogue school in your congregation and you decided that Congregation Rodfei Momon had a better synagogue school, you could not send your kid there. It would be almost impossible. Look what happened to him.

"I sent her to another Hebrew school, which was also equal distance. A year before we left, someone found out and raised all hell. They came to the board meeting and said it wasn't good for the rabbi's business. I had some furious battles and told them I would not countenance anyone telling me where to send my child to school. But they were afraid of the image. If it's not good for the rabbi's daughter, it's not good for us, too. I have nothing to do with that. My life is my life and if you don't like it, it's tough."

But, of course, he changed jobs.

Those are some of the problems. You may know others. I want to leave you with a couple of words of reassurance--a couple of redeeming features. Remember, that the laymen are very interested in preserving your husband in his symbolic role. They will stretch a lot for that. You have to test those limits. But you have a lot more flexibility than you imagine you have.

I want to say something that may sound like a woman's libber, and I am all for women's liberation, To the degree you carve your own life out, whether that be a life in conjunction with your husband, or a life separate from your husband's and the degree to which you are able to work that out with your husbands, having your own life, that you are not just adjunct to him, you will be able to get satisfaction in other things and to separate yourself in that sense from that symbolic role. You may not take that choice. You may say, I am more comfortable being the *hazzante* rather than having my own career, profession, work, etc. If you do that, even in that role as *hazzante*, you probably have more flexibility than you imagine to be your own person. I said the same thing to your husbands, yesterday

Not being Number One has its tremendous negative frustrations and I hear it all the time. The amount of energy that is dedicated in this convention, to talking about your husband's rabbis, whether positive or negative, I can certainly understand. But that represents enormous emotional energy on that one subject which seems never to get resolved and goes on and on. In some way, the national Jewish organizations, the Cantors Assembly, the Rabbinical Assembly have to take a look at that. That's a waste of energy, a waste of manpower, and a waste of resources.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: (These have been somewhat edited. Almost all names have been removed.)

#### Woman #1

Every person has a personality. We can control our own personalities and we must at all times. We can't control our children, our husbands, but ourselves. Every congregation has a personality. I feel the groundwork that you lay when you come at first, is what carries you through the rest of the tenure at that congregation. So, you must be very

careful to make your own habits, your own groundwork and stick to it... I do only what I enjoy. You could either learn from me, or do your own thing. But believe me, be yourself. Even if you please everybody and you don't please yourself, you are still nothing.

JHB:

I think that's great, fantastic. The only thing you do have to consider as you do that, is that you are putting stuff into the marital pot. What I am saying is that no other family would have to think, if their kid went to Young Israel~ that that might be an issue as far as the congregational relationship is concerned. You've worked it through, you've solved it. You've said, my kid is going to do what he wants to do, that's fine. With your experience, you probably haven't learned anything new today. That's fine too.

Woman #2:

I would like to make a comment on your last statement about being Number Two. I disagree with that wholeheartedly. I'd like to say why. I think that you set your own pace as a cantor and as a *hazzante*, depending on you. If you are a secure individual, and if you have confidence in what you do, you will never be Number Two. I don't think there is such a thing as Number One and Number Two. I have a young lady sitting next to me, who is now married to a cantor whose parents are members of our congregation and whose husband's parents are members of our congregation. I think she will bear me out. In our congregation, perhaps we have a very unique situation, where possibly, the cantor is Number One and the rabbi is Number Two. But we do not look at it, in that sense. It depends on you--how you conduct yourself. If you are secure in what you are doing, the rabbi can hock from today until tomorrow, it really will not mean a thing. If you are able to get up there, not only as a *hazzan*, how good you are, but also as an individual, how friendly you are, how diplomatic you are and everything that surrounds you, you will never be Number Two. I don't buy that at all. I am not saying that strictly as a cantor's wife. I want to be more objective. I would like to put myself in a position as a layman and think how I would feel. I honestly do feel it--if you can look at your *hazzan* and respect him because he knows what he is, he knows where he is going and he knows what he is. He's no Number Two.

Someone else from the floor brings up the following point:

You told us that in your situation possibly the cantor has more power than the rabbi. That's a situation which doesn't exist in other congregations. I don't think you realize what cantors in other congregations have to contend with and how they have to conduct themselves. It's an entirely different situation.

JHB;

I think the fact of the matter is that it is very important for each of us that we feel that we are Number One and that we are important and that the world was created for my sake. I don't disagree. You have to feel that. I have to feel that about myself and I hope your husbands feel that about themselves. The fact of the matter is, in terms of synagogue power and politics today, it is not accidental that new rabbinical students get paid higher salaries than do cantorial students and that in terms of the power apex of the congregation, the fact is, that your husband is not Number One. He may be talented, he may be brilliant, and he may be a wonderful human being. In terms of the power structure that's not so.

Woman #3;

Despite the fact that one is able to make friends and close friends among the congregation, there is still a desperate need for someone to confide in, to pour out one's heart--a sister, mother.

JHB;

The only way that I think that can be dealt with in a congregational setting, to some extent what the CCAR is trying to do for its rabbis now. It's very important and ought to be done by the Conservative Movement for its rabbis and its cantors. There's no reason why this cannot be done for its cantors as well; to create support groups of local clergymen. It doesn't always have to be Jews necessarily but to talk about human issues and to cut down those kinds of barriers so that friendships can be created among clergy groups.

Woman #3:

When we came to (our community), we were the first new young cantor to come, in about twenty years. All of the others were, like in my father's generation--not one of them, or the rabbis, invited us, and called us. All the years we've been there, when they plan things, they leave my husband out.

Chair:

People do have a lot of things that bother them. Isolation *is* one important thing and hard to overcome.

Woman #4:

I want to take issue with you. My husband says I was a woman's libber before it became fashionable I've had an *aliyah*<sup>13</sup> ... terribly strong words against every woman, whether she's a cantor's wife or not ... separate thing. I have a separate thing.

JHB:

I didn't say that. You shut your ears half way through.  
I said that was one way to go, not the only way.

Woman #4

I think that as a woman, and as somebody's wife, we have a tendency to forget two things, which I think is one of the reasons our kids (have problems) and all of the other problems come. A little bit of discipline and a little bit of wisdom pays off. The business of going to *shule* in blue jeans perhaps could go under either being wise or disciplined, or I'd like to use the word respect. If my husband, at home, would let me know that he is a little upset with the way I look in *shule*, if he has to look at me while he is singing, it doesn't kill me to come so I don't upset him. If I want to sit in the backyard and upset him, then he doesn't have to look at me. I think there's a little too much of this forgetting. I'm talking about children too. The reason kids do what they

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<sup>13</sup> Aliyah-the act of being called to the Torah to recite the blessings over the reading. An act that recent egalitarian trends have opened to women.

do is because they grow up with no discipline. There's nothing so terrible to tell your kid that if she wants to come to *shule*, come like a decent lady. If you don't want to come and please your father, stay home. It's not so bad to say, "no" to a kid sometime.

### JHB

I sense that at one point, in what I said~ people shut their ears to hearing other things. The only thing I am saying is when the clergyman's wife shows up, however she's dressed, if it were another wife, it would not be an issue for public concern. Incidentally, there's a lot of data for that. It becomes an issue with that woman. It does not become an issue in terms of that family and the public image of the male. It becomes an issue for that woman to take up with other women, with other men, if someone says that. There's a lot of evidence for that. That is a reality. I am not saying it is good or bad at this point.

### Chair:

I don't mean to explain what Dr. Bloom said, but we all live in a glass house. It makes no difference whether you are a rabbi's wife or a cantor's wife. In Cleveland, we have a rabbi's wife who comes to services in high boots, breeches and very, very, mod clothes. The whole city, members of the congregation or not, talks about her. You have to be discreet. There are certain limitations.

### Woman #5:

Coming from a southern city, Atlanta, where if they don't know you, they don't trust you, coming as a Litvak<sup>14</sup>, with an accent from a different part of the world, was a double problem. Stepping into a synagogue where the rabbi has been for 48 years, God bless him, he's a wonderful man. We have two rabbis, two *rebbitzens*. My husband is more active with those rabbis in the community and so am I. I don't look for who is first, who is second. My husband is respected for the job he does and I won't put my husband second to anybody. To me, he's first. I get along very well with my *rebbitzen*. Women come in slacks, to the synagogue. Our rabbi made it very clear--this is the House of

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<sup>14</sup> A Jew from Lithuania who is perceived by non-Lithuanian Jews as having a decided accent.

God, you dress with respect. The other thing: In the Sisterhood, I do not volunteer to do any work, unless they ask me. I do go to all Board Meetings. I try to make it a point to show interest in my Sisterhood, not because my husband makes a living, but because I am a Jewish woman who takes an interest in my religion. I am not pleasing anybody, as Dr. Bloom said. I don't have the social life Saturday night as I would want to, but it is part of my bread and butter. That's how I look at it and that's how I cope with it. As far as my children-I have a married son. There was a time in his senior year in high school, in Atlanta, he told me that in the choir they would be singing Christmas carols in a shopping center. I said no son of mine is going to sing Christmas carols. My second son came to me when he was twenty years old. He said, I cannot live your life or Daddy's life. I have to live a life of my own. I have to drive on *Shabbes*<sup>15</sup> in order to keep up with my friends. I am not asking you. Out of respect, I want you to know I am not doing this behind your back. I accepted it. There was no discussion about it. He has a music group and is part of it. He told all of the people, do not introduce me as cantor Goodfriend's son. I am David Goodfriend and if you don't like it, I am not going to play with the group. No questions. If the community likes it or not, I couldn't care less. As long as I know that I am right within myself and right with my God, that's all I care about. Don't antagonize... don't gossip.

### JHB

I want to add one sentence with respect to what you have done. The only thing I want you to take a look at, because apparently I've touched on some very sensitive nerves, is that everything you've said is a response, your way of dealing with what those realities are. I have no objections to how you deal with them. Each person is going to deal with them in her own way. That's fine. If you deal with them in a way that provides you strength and satisfaction, that's great. The only thing that I think is important is not to lose sight of the fact that you are responding to a series of difficulties, as a matter of fact, that another professional's wife would not have to respond to.

### Woman #6

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<sup>15</sup>, For traditional Jews, driving is not permitted, on the Sabbath.

One of the things we are very sensitive about is being called Number Two.

JHB;

On that, I am going to be adamant. That is sad. The way you deal with that is important.

Chair:

May I add, I feel there are two ways in which we can certainly be Number One. Number One is the fact that we are married to a cantor and we should always try, whatever we do, to elevate the status, the position of the cantor. The second is, who is there, besides us, I'm sure there are people besides us, but who more than us, is entitled to be in the forefront, to encourage the playing of Jewish music, the performance of Jewish music. There are people who have Tuesday afternoon music clubs, etc. It's the Jewish music area where we can really make our contribution. We should go to different programs and ask that this music be put on--it doesn't have to be cantorial music. You should be identified with your husband's profession in that way.

JHB;

I want to strike a difference in my perception. This is my first time at a cantor's convention. I've been at rabbinical conventions before. I want you to know something again. I don't think that denying the reality of where your husband is in the power structure of the congregation is wise. You may deal with it the way Ida said, which is great. And the extent to which your husband carves out that musical area, you help him do that~ is tremendously important. But I don't think it's going to be useful to you with powerful speeches, with roars of approval, to deny the reality' that in the power structure of the synagogue, your husband is not Number One. That is the reality. One of the tests of that is the amount of energy that I hear in the two days I am here, the amount of talk that goes on about rabbis. Let me tell you, at the Rabbinical Assembly convention, the cantor is a small bone in the rabbi's throat. He is not a large steer-size or cow sized bone, the way I hear it in this convention. That is a reaction to - you don't hear rabbis talking, incidentally, and I want you to know this, I am not praising

them or anything else. You do not hear them talking with the same energy and involvement of how they relate to their cantors or cantors' wives. Some of them couldn't care less. That's sad, tragic, because the cantor and the cantor's wife are a tremendous resource for friendship, for support, for working together and those kinds of things. That's a tragedy. Don't get me wrong. It's a tragedy that the rabbi and cantor are traditionally pitted against each other. It's an anomaly when you get on well together. But rabbis do not spend the energy talking about the *hazzanim* that the *hazzanim* spend talking about the rabbi. That's a reflection of the reality. That's a sad one, a tragic one, but right now it's a true one in the political situation. Denial of that will not do you much good in the long run.

Woman #7:

I think that the problem is something that I find created, not from my rabbi, not from the cantor, but from the congregation. I find that although my husband and I are treated with respect and with love, the rabbi is given the aura of Number One. When someone falls ill, you're the last one to hear of it. When there's a funeral that does not involve my husband, when it's the mother of a congregant who had her own rabbi and cantor, we don't hear of it until we get a postcard. How do we start to educate the young people, who are now coming up, so that the cantor and rabbi can be seen as one?

JHB:

Are you sure you want that? For people who want to move in that direction, that's fine. I want you to know that with that aura also goes problems. If you decide, if someone decides to move in that direction, that's OK, but with that aura there are also problems.

Chair:

I think you should be realistic. The synagogue in the United States today is approaching that form of state where the rabbi is considered akin to a pope. L'havdil<sup>16</sup>, of course. You are the one who said that you haven't spoken to your rabbi's wife for eight years, be careful. I want

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<sup>16</sup> L'havidil is to differentiate-in this instance the rabbi from the pope.

you to know that my husband has been president of the Cantors Assembly for a number of year~ during the course of which, many *hazzanim* came to him and wept on his shoulder. I'm glad that you have a good situation, but I would hazard a guess and say that 75-85% of *hazzanim* do have gripes. It's only human when you are that much associated in the pulpit: it's a question of personalities. When it comes to the power structure, if it comes to a battle as to who is first, the rabbi will win out because in the mind of the American Jew, the rabbi is Number One.

### Woman # 8

I'm from Utica, a small town in upstate New York: a very, very *goyishe*<sup>17</sup> town. It has its advantages, of course. On the other hand, it's very, very lonely. The only people that I really have to be friends with, have something in common with us, similar backgrounds, aspirations, standards and values, are the Jews in our congregation. Those are the very people that we have difficulty relating to, because of shifting gears, etc. What I want to know is this: the situation where you counsel, where you bring in groups of clergymen, regardless of their religious background--I would find it hard to believe, that by getting together with the gentile clergymen in my area, I would get a feeling and the answers to the questions that I have. I don't want to know what the Protestant minister's wife feels about pre-marital birth control. I want to know what my peer group, my Jewish friends with girls the same age as my daughter feel.

### JHB:

In some ways, I'm aware of that when we've gone to their homes. I'm in a group of Protestant clergymen. We've been meeting every Wednesday morning for three years. We don't really work on supervision. The most important work that we've done is a kind of sharing with one another. They reverberate instantly to what the experience is of being a pulpit clergyman. They know the loneliness. They told me one story this week of what it's like for them to be in the bathroom. As soon as a layman walks in and spots that it's a clergyman, he turns around and walks out. I don't know if you've had that

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<sup>17</sup> Gentile

experience but they have had the experience regularly. They respond when they are with other clergymen. The fact is that we're all subject to the pressures, isolation and loneliness of the pulpit clergy, given our various responses. I'm aware that when I'm at their house, there is openness. It may not be with all Protestant clergy. *Halevai*<sup>18</sup> it should be Jewish clergy who could get together. I don't know if there are enough, in Utica, to do that, but certainly working out a way to do that should be possible. You have to understand something--if you get Jewish clergy together, in a town like Philadelphia, you will have enough of an assortment where you can find somebody who can be a kindred spirit. But it's potluck to assume that the rabbi and his wife and the cantor and his wife are going to be friends simply because they are Jewish clergy. They share a lot. But *halevai* they could get a group together of husbands and wives, or just wives and just husbands, to get into that kind of sharing—hey—"What do you do for your daughter?" The people in your congregation won't share that. I find that in many ways the Protestant clergy, the liberal ones among them, do tend to share a lot of that stuff--that isolation, that loneliness. I'm not suggesting that it's the way but that isolation and loneliness is a killer.

JHB comments to a speaker from the floor:

That's a very important problem. The only thing I can say to that is, if you gave me a million dollars and the power to do what I could do, what I would do is get clergy families together. I would work very hard in trying to open up the lines between children and parents, as I would do with any other family, and get them to talk about those resentments. What it's like for the father and mother, to really see for the kids what it's like to be children of clergymen. Helping them to appreciate what the dilemma is for the parents. I am much more understanding of my father now than I was when I was 14 or 19. It's amazing how wise he has grown over the years. There is really no one solution for that. The attempt to keep the lines open, to hear what the feelings are on both sides, not only for the parents to hear what the kids are feeling. I think it's important for kids to hear what it's like for daddy to be called away for a funeral when there's something going on in the family and how daddy covers those feelings, hides them, etc. That's not an answer or a prescription, but if the national organizations could help us do that, it

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<sup>18</sup> Yiddish colloquial for God-willing.

would be tremendously valuable. Just to open up.

Woman #9:

We had a board meeting at the end of the summer last year. The president said; "Is there any new business?" I raised my hand. This is an idea that has been in my mind for years. It so happens that the Women's League came out with a statement, before this, that they should have a *Rosh Hodesh*<sup>19</sup> group. I got up at this meeting and said it would be a wonderful idea if we had a *Rosh Hodesh* in our Sisterhood. She said," fine, how about writing a letter to the congregation, telling them all about it?" I did, I outlined it, I ran it for one year, meeting once a year, in individual homes, and we discussed Jewish culture. I found there was a crying need for Jewish women to build their backgrounds on Jewish culture. The average woman does not know anything about her culture. I take things from the beginning. The first thing I speak about is the Jewish calendar. From the Jewish calendar. we went to the Sabbath. From the Sabbath, to the different holidays. Then I said to myself," I must bring in things that the average woman would be interested in." So I took up the idea of cooking, how we came about making kugel, fish. I aroused their interest and now the Women are so curious to find out about their own culture that they are asking me to continue another year. It's a wonderful idea for Jewish women to get together, to have a rapport with them, socialize with them-there's an interest and you get to know one another very well.

Woman #10:

I am a new cantor's wife. How shall I address my husband in public?

JHB

Let me tell you what my experience has been over the years. That's something for you and him to work out. It didn't make any difference, as a matter of fact, what people called me. If your husband decides that he wants to be known as *Hazzan.*, to everybody, that's OK. I didn't put out what I wanted to be called. There were people who called me by my first name and added to it, Rabbi Jack. On the phone, Rabbi became

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<sup>19</sup> First day of the Hebrew month-often observed as a holiday for women.

my first name. People would say is Rabbi there? as if I didn't have any name. A lot of clergymen lose their first name. I don't think it makes any difference. They're going to do what's comfortable to them. If you want to call him by his first name and you feel comfortable with that, I would do so.

Woman #11:

I would like to commend you on your original comments. You really presented a very fine summary of some of the things that really disturb us, some of the issues, which we face regularly in our positions as cantors' wives. From the discussion here we see just how much emotion is involved in our positions, we see some of the thanklessness about our positions, we see loneliness, isolation--all these things which you brought up. We see that many of us do not have the opportunity to interact with each other, communicate with each other during the year. I would like to suggest that for future programming for the convention, which is the one time that we all get together, that we place some women on the planning committee, to plan for some women's sessions. This is a very big group and it is hard to discuss with each other. I think if we had more of a workshop, with leaders with which we could interact, with each other and bring up some of these problems in a more personal manner, it would be very helpful.

Chair:

As Dr. Bloom said before, it is very difficult for us to open our hearts to members of our community. It is much easier to speak to someone, who is a minimum of three or ten miles away and this is why, instead of closing the session at 11:30, it's now almost 12:30. I feel this is the only opportunity we have to really be honest and talk what is in our hearts. We are very happy to have had this opportunity, Dr. Bloom, because we never have a chance to talk like this and to lay our cards on the table.

Woman #12:

After eight years, we have finally found a position, in which we are comfortable. We have finally come up with a workable situation where my husband is comfortable, I'm comfortable ... first time in eight years,

genuinely happy as a person. That is, he has finally realized that he is an employee. There *is* nothing degrading about being an employee I have a boss, there is nothing wrong with that. In this case, the boss happens to be the rabbi. And the rabbi has a boss, too.

JHB;

And the rabbi has a boss, too, and at the rabbinical conventions he talks about his boss.

Woman #13

We have found it to be most comfortable not to fight about Number One and Number Two. Be supportive of your husbands.

JHB;

No question about that--the degree to which he is the music guy can be very important.

Woman #14;

What is it and why is it that our husbands have, what you call, a bone in our throat? Has anyone ever analyzed the reason why these situations exist? Yes, you can talk to your rabbi on a one-to-one basis. You as cantor. It is appreciated if you make hospital calls or sick calls, or whatever other things you do, in addition to *davening*<sup>20</sup> and teaching bar and bat mitzvah. But how can you make a sick call if you don't know about it? Why when somebody dies, the rabbi tells you after the body is in the ground. A lot of little things like being unable to go and talk to your rabbi on a one-to-one basis, without airing your public laundry before the board. These things could be avoided on a one-to-one, man-to-man basis. The next day there is the same situation. "Cantor, I'd like you to cut this morning; I'm not going to speak, these people are in a hurry." He gets up and speaks for an hour and you are told to cut. Eroding little thing~ I realize. But all these little things that you try to iron out, but you can't. How do you deal with that, psychologically?

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<sup>20</sup> In this context, leading the congregation in public worship.

JHB:

You have the same thing with a husband and wife. The question is-- when they don't hear each other's pain. Whenever I work with couples, what couples do to each other is to set each other off. I do it to my wife and she does it to me. That's the thing that hurts me most. When I'm fighting with my wife that hurts me most. When things are good, that's the thing I like the best. It happens to husband and wife; we shut each other off; we don't hear each other's pain. The rabbi and the cantor is also a *shidduch*<sup>21</sup>. The only thing you can suggest is trying to get the men together, maybe with someone else, to consult with them. To have them open up--explore what the pain is with each other and have them deal with it. Unfortunately, some marriages end up in divorce, some make it and some go on not talking to each other for years. That's what marriage therapists call the back-to-back divorce. The couple stays together and they live, back to back, for 25 years.

Woman #15:

My husband had the same situation. At one point, a funeral of someone we knew took place and we went and the rabbi said to my husband; "Were you invited?" My husband was taken aback. He went to the president and said; "I want you to give the girls in the office orders that when there is a funeral, or someone is ill, I want to be notified." Had nothing to do with officiating. I want you to know that from that time on it is the rabbi who has the office call my husband.

Chair:

I think we have all spoken beautifully. I think it is an unusual opportunity to talk among ourselves and we are very grateful to Dr. Bloom for his keen insights. Thank you.

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<sup>21</sup> A match as in a couple to be engaged or married.