

Women of the Wall

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Content Areas:

Grades: 9th –12th grade

Objective: This lesson teaches participants about a contemporary Jewish feminist group and invites participants to explore the relationship between feminism and holiness. The lesson also introduces the concept of transphobia and its connection to misogyny.

ראש חודש <i>Rosh Chodesh</i> Head of the Month	בראשית <i>Bereishit</i> at the head of	ראשית <i>Reshiyt</i> Summit
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What do all these words have in common?

ראש (*rosh*) or head is the root word of all of them, hence they all are beginnings in a way. We will talk about the head of an interesting thing in our community, feminism.

Who are the Women of the Wall?

- * Introduce Women of the Wall (הכותל נשות, *Nashot HaKotel*). <http://womenofthewall.org.il/>
- * Discuss how women praying out loud on the woman's side of the Western Wall, reading from the Torah and wearing *tallitot* (prayer shawls), *tefillin* (phylacteries), and *kippot* (headcoverings) might be seen by various Jewish communities.

Why are Women of the Wall so controversial?

Women of the Wall (WOW) chose Rosh Chodesh as the day to gather as a women's prayer group and celebrate their proud history, through prayer at the Wall and reading the special portion for Rosh Chodesh from the Torah scroll. WOW has been doing this for the past 21 years. At first they were allowed to pray out loud, with *talit* and *tefillin* and read from the Torah at the Kotel, or the Western Wall. But soon both ultra-Orthodox men and women were uncomfortable with this new *minhag*, or tradition.

Watch clip from Women of the Wall by Faye Lederman and discuss. If that film cannot be obtained, show a preview of Praying in Her Own Voice by Yael Katzir: www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-xjZWX5rIE

Questions for Discussion:

- Why do you think the women of the Wall are or aren't being holy?
- Why do you think the Women of the Wall are pressing so hard to sometimes break the law, unjust or not, to read out loud from Torah and wear *talit* and *tefillin*?
- What about this is based on the Women of the Wall wearing "men's clothing"?
- Does this brand them as transgressing gender to those who see them?



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- Transphobia is an irrational fear of, and/or hostility towards, people who are transgender or who otherwise transgress traditional gender norms. Because lesbians and gay men often transgress gender norms, it is often associated with homophobia. In what ways might transphobia really be part of what they are struggling against, and not just misogyny?
- What role does Kol Isha [a law about women not being allowed to sing in public] play into their struggle?
- How might feminism and the fight against homophobia and transphobia make our communities more holy?

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