

Ultra Ortodoks Yahudilikte Kızların Din Eğitimi Sorunu: Sarah Schenirer ve Bais Yaakov Hareketi Örneği

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Öz

Ultra Ortodoks Yahudi geleneğinde kadınlar ve erkekler için değişen sosyal ve dinî rollerine yönelik eğitim sunan farklı türlerde okullar mevcuttur. Bu farklılık bilhassa din eğitimi müfredatlarında gözle görülür bir hâl almaktadır. Kadınların, erkeklerin aldığı din eğitimi-ne mukayeseye daha sınırlı da olsa almayı başardıkları din eğitimi 1917 yılına kadar sistemli bir yapıya sahip değildi. XIX. yüzyılın sonlarında, kız çocukları arasında hızla yükselen seküler dünya ilgisi temelde Yahudi kız çocuklarının dinî eğitimden yoksun olmasıyla karakterize edilmiş ve çözüm olarak Sarah Schenirer (1883-1935) tarafından Yahudi kız çocuklarına yönelik dinî okulların açılması gerekli görülmüştür. Schenirer bu girişimle, yenilik karşıtı bir kültürde değişiklik çağrısında bulunarak Ultra Ortodoks kız çocuklarının, Yahudi kimliklerini muhafaza edip topluma bağlı kalmalarını amaçlamıştır. Bu amaçla Schenirer, 1917 yılında ilk Bais Yaakov okulunu kurmuş ve okul birkaç yıl içinde hızla büyüyerek Avrupa çapında geniş kapsamlı bir “okullar ağına”, Bais Yaakov hareketine dönüşmüştür. Söz konusu girişim, yenilik karşıtı Ultra Ortodoks Yahudiliğin bünyesinde, din eğitiminin muhatap kitlesine yönelik değişimi başlatan domino taşı görevi üstlenmiştir. Bu yönüyle Sarah Schenirer’ı tanımak Bais Yaakov’un, kendisini Ultra Ortodoks Yahudilik içerisinde nasıl meşrulaştırdığını ve kızların eğitiminde gerçekleştirilen bu yeniliğin, gerekli kaynaklardan ve destekten yoksun görünen bir gelenek içinde nasıl bir temel bulduğunu analiz etmenin kilit noktasıdır. Ultra Ortodoks Yahudiliğin din eğitimi konusunda Türkiye’de yeterli çalışmanın olmadığı dikkate alındığında Bais Yaakov’un söz konusu eğitim faaliyetleri hakkındaki bu çalışmanın dinler tarihi alanına katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

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The Problem of Girls' Religious Education in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism: The Case of Sarah Schenirer and Bais Yaakov Movement

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Abstract

In the ultra-Orthodox Jewish tradition, there are different types of schools for men and women, providing education for their varying social and religious roles. This difference is particularly visible in the religious education curricula. Until 1917, the religious education that women were able to receive, albeit to a lesser extent than the religious education received by men, was not systematised. In the late nineteenth century, the rapidly growing interest in the secular world among girls was mainly characterised by the lack of religious education for Jewish girls, and Sarah Schenirer (1883-1935) found it necessary to open religious schools for Jewish girls as a solution. With this initiative, Schenirer called for change in an anti-innovationist culture and aimed to help Ultra-Orthodox girls retain their Jewish identity and remain connected to the community. To this end, Schenirer founded the first Bais Yaakov school in 1917, and within a few years the school grew rapidly into an extensive “network of schools” across Europe, and became known as the Bais Yaakov movement. This initiative acted as the domino that initiated the change in the addressee profile of religious education within the anti-innovationist Ultra-Orthodox Judaism. In this respect, knowing Sarah Schenirer is key to analysing how Bais Yaakov legitimised itself within Ultra-Orthodox Judaism and how this innovation in girls' education found a foundation within a tradition that seemed to lack the necessary resources and support. Considering that there are not enough studies on religious education in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism in Turkey, we believe that this study on the educational activities of Bais Yaakov will contribute to the field of history of religions.

Keywords

History of Religions, Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, Religious Education, Bais Yaakov, Sarah Schenirer.

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Introduction

Women's exemption from religious education is part of traditional Jewish law.¹ Although Jewish law does not explicitly prohibit women from studying Torah/Talmud and Jewish history includes many female scholars,² tradition has frowned upon women's religious education. In many passages in the Talmud, women's study of Torah is described as inappropriate³ and unattractive.⁴ The negative attitude towards the religious education of girls persisted among the Jews of Eastern Europe until the late nineteenth century.⁵ Orthodox Judaism did not establish a formal educational system for women as Torah study was not mandatory for them. While boys received a comprehensive education that laid a strong foundation for their religious identity, girls were primarily educated by their mothers and female relatives for their domestic roles.⁶ During this period, Ultra-Orthodox families who wished to educate their daughters hired private tutors or sent them to non-Jewish schools, risking exposing them to secular influences.⁷

The compulsory education law enacted in Poland in the 20th century was considered the beginning of a crisis, especially for girls. Some parents were reluctant to send their sons to these schools because it would interfere with their Torah studies, preferring to pay a fine. During this period, Aaron Marcus, a German Jewish intellectual living in Krakow, proposed that parents should send all their daughters to public schools.⁸ This practice ensured that boys were exempted from compulsory education, as the number of students who could be admitted to public schools was limited. As young girls without religious education received secular education in public schools, a critical period began. This period saw developments such as disobedience to religious commandments, marriage with members of other religions, conversion to Christianity to avoid arranged marriages, and assimilation. These developments, along with the fear of losing the younger generation, led to a deep social crisis within Ultra-Orthodox Judaism.⁹ The assimilation of Jewish girls, whose religious education had been neglected for centuries, into a secular education was the driving force behind the reform and pedagogical activities of Sarah Schenirer (1883-1935), a seamstress in Krakow. In 1917, Schenirer pioneered the establishment of the first Bais Yaakov school in Poland to provide religious education for girls.¹⁰

1 Sefaria, "Kiddushin 34a:6" (Access 02 December 2023); Sefaria, "Shabbat 33b:3" (Access 02 December 2023); Sefaria, "Berekhhot 2:3" (Access 02 December 2023).

2 Prominent names as examples: Breruah, Yalta, and Deborah.

3 Sefaria, "Ketubbot 108b:3" (Access 02 December 2023).

4 Sefaria, "Sotah 21b:1" (Access 02 December 2023).

5 Michal Shaul, "The Legacy of Sarah Schenirer and the Rebuilding of Ultraorthodox Society after the Holocaust", *Jewish Culture and History* 21/4 (01 October 2020), 350.

6 Joanna Lisek, "Orthodox Yiddishism in Beys Yakov Magazine in the Context of Religious Jewish Feminism in Poland", *Ashkenazim and Sephardim: a European Perspective*, ed. Andrzej Kałtyn vd. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Edition, 2013), 128.

7 Debbie Weissman, "A Historical Case Study in Jewish Women's Education: Chana Shpitzer and Ma'aleh", *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 29 (2015), 21.

8 Naomi Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement: A Revolution in the Name of Tradition* (London: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 19.

9 Shulamit Almog - Lotem Perry-Hazan, "The Ability to Claim and the Opportunity to Imagine: Rights Consciousness and the Education of Ultra-Orthodox Girls", *Journal of Law and Education* 40/2 (2011), 280.

10 Noa Lea Cohn, "Feminine Identity in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women's Contemporary Art", *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 38/2 (2020), 283.

Bais Yaakov was founded by Schenirer with two main aims. The first aim was to rescue young girls who had lost their Jewish identity due to their interest in the secular world. The second aim was to raise generations of pious Jewish women who would be willing to enter the workforce, thus enabling their husbands to devote all their time to the study of traditional religious texts. To achieve these goals, a curriculum was developed for young girls that included religious education as well as practical subjects such as accounting and nursing. These subjects enabled girls to take on the financial responsibilities of the household while their husbands devoted themselves to Torah study. The Bais Yaakov movement was accompanied by numerous subsidiary organizations. In addition to vocational training institutions, the Bais Yaakov movement included a chain of summer camps, teachers' schools, a monthly literary magazine and periodicals serving schools or districts, publishing houses, libraries, clubhouses, leadership programmes, employment offices, and many other activities. Today, Bais Yaakov is the largest Ultra-Orthodox women's educational network in Israel and America.¹¹ These schools provide vocational training and have greatly expanded the scope and quality of existing educational programmes through the Bais Yaakov college programmes, supporting employment opportunities. In the last decade, they have made significant contributions towards this goal.¹²

This study aims to contribute to the field of the history of religions by examining the religious education of girls in the Ultra-Orthodox community in Türkiye, with a focus on Sarah Schenirer and her activities. The main source of information for this study is the book *A Revolution in the Name of Tradition: Sara Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement* prepared by Prof. Naomi Seidman, contains the English translation of Schenirer's diaries. The Bais Yaakov Project website, founded by Naomi Seidman, a Bais Yaakov alumna frequently referred to in our study, contains documents on the history of Bais Yaakov and the people and institutions involved in the establishment of the school, particularly Sarah Schenirer.

This study provides a brief analysis of Schenirer's life based on her diaries, with a focus on her role in establishing Bais Yaakov. The text examines the evaluations of Schenirer as "revolutionary" and "feminist", taking into account the establishment process and the current situation of Bais Yaakov, which now has many subsidiary organisations.

1. The Life of Sarah Schenirer

Sarah Schenirer was born on 3 July 1883 in Krakow, Poland. She was the third of nine children of Bezalel and Rosa Schenirer. From a young age, she received religious education and was raised with Jewish teachings.¹³ Schenirer attended a public school in Poland until the eighth grade, where the curriculum was dominated by Polish language, literature, and culture.¹⁴

11 Taragin-Zeller, "Modesty for Heaven's Sake: Authority and Creativity among Female Ultra-Orthodox Teenagers in Israel", *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 26 (2014), 75.

12 Esther B. Schupak, "Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women Performing Gender in Julius Caesar", *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 24/2 (03 April 2019), 161.

13 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 241.

14 In late 19th and early 20th century Poland, there were significant differences in the education provided to boys and girls. Jewish girls, in particular, had limited opportunities for religious education. While boys attended the 'Heder' and focused on Torah study, girls attended Polish public schools where they

Schenirer was proficient in Polish and German, but she intentionally used Yiddish in her conversations and preferred to be addressed in Yiddish.¹⁵ Despite being born into a orthodox family, some of her siblings and many of her friends left Orthodoxy due to the rapid secularisation of the environment in which she grew up. Schenirer was deeply interested in the Yiddish religious texts provided to her by her father and was nicknamed “Hosidke” (little hasid or little pious) due to her religious identity.¹⁶ Schenirer’s interests extended beyond Torah and Talmud study. On occasion, she attended lectures at a Christian women’s club. In her diary, she mentions her attendance at this club, stating, “...I sometimes attend lectures at the Christian women’s club. In fact, I regretted every time I went there, but in those days, there was no other place where I could listen to an intellectual discussion...”¹⁷

Some of the limited data we have on Schenirer’s personal life is related to her marriage. Her first marriage was to Shmuel Nussbaum in 1910, which ended in 1913. Following the outbreak of World War I, she emigrated with her family to Vienna in late 1914. Her second marriage was to Rabbi Yitzhak Landau around 1930.¹⁸ Schenirer was married twice in her lifetime. Despite being married twice, she was known by the surname “Schenirer”. She passed away in Krakow on March 1, 1935 after a brief period of treatment for stomach cancer.¹⁹

2. Formation of the Idea of Bais Yaakov

On her initial trip to Vienna, Schenirer met Rabbi Moshe Flesh²⁰ (1879-1944) through

learned to read and write in Yiddish and sometimes Hebrew from private teachers. Marsha L. Rozenblit, “Habsburg Monarchy: Nineteenth to Twentieth Centuries”, *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, ed. Jennifer Sartori (Access 31 December 2022); In the same years, there were institutions in Russia called Heder Metukkan, which also taught subjects such as mathematics and literature, and approached Jewish learning with innovations such as the study of the meaning of sacred texts in Modern Hebrew. Samuel C. Heilman - Menahem Friedman, *The Rebbe: The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 69-70.

- 15 Hanoch Teller, *Builders: Stories and Insights into the Lives of Three Paramount Figures of the Torah Renaissance* (New York: New York City Publishing, 2000), 243; Schenirer’s structures aimed to combat assimilation by promoting the use of Yiddish. In line with this approach, she eliminated the Polish section of the Bais Yaakov Journal in 1929. The Bais Yaakov Journal later stated in 1930: ‘Speaking Polish is not a sin, but speaking it out of shame for Yiddish is a great sin!’ At its national conference in 1937, Bnos Agudat passed resolutions requiring its members to use Yiddish or Hebrew names and to speak Yiddish as their everyday language. Jewish Women’s Archive, “Agudat Israel: Interwar Poland” (Access 31 December 2022).
- 16 In her diary, Schenirer several times mentions the nickname ‘Little Mrs Hasid’: Sometimes, I would reprimand a Jewish girl, but she would just laugh and say that I was Little Mrs. Hasid. Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 55; ...The only issue I had was that many people there consumed food that was religiously problematic, which could be a mixture of meat and milk. When I chose not to eat with them, they made fun of me, laughed, and called me ‘Little Mrs Hasid’. However, I am no longer ashamed of this nickname. Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 371.
- 17 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 243.
- 18 In her diary, Schenirer expresses dissatisfaction with the non-traditional start to her marriage. She believes it would have been better if she had not heard her future husband’s voice or met him before the wedding. About her husband she says: “I ask for very little! All I want is to work in both the material and spiritual spheres, but he (Shmuel Nussbaum) has no interest in this kind of work!” Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 195.
- 19 Deborah Weissman, “Sarah Schenirer”, *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, ed. Jennifer Sartori, (Access 21 December 2022).
- 20 David Moritz Flesch was born in Pressburg in 1879. In 1914, he served as a rabbi in Vienna. He provided

her landlord, who informed her of the existence of an Orthodox Shul²¹ in the neighbourhood.²² Schenirer's memoirs suggest that this encounter in Vienna inspired her to develop the concept of religious education for Jewish girls. Schenirer attended Rabbi Flesh's Orthodox synagogue in Stumpergasse and was impressed by the rabbi's sermons for women congregants, which she had not encountered in her own neighbourhood.²³ Schenirer listened attentively to Flesh's sermons, in which he spoke of the heroism of the Maccabean women and their role in the uprising. Flesh mentioned Yudit,²⁴ who was willing to sacrifice her life so that her future daughters could continue the Jewish tradition: "This war is not over yet. The war must be fought on all fronts, and women today should join the fight, just like Yudit did long ago." In her diary, she describes how she decided to carry this message from Vienna to Krakow after the rabbi's sermon.

"In the sermon, the rabbi portrayed the historical figure of Yudit as great and sublime. He passionately called on Jewish women and girls to follow her example. While caught up in the spiritual portrayal of Yudit, the thought occurred to me that it would be wonderful if all the women and girls in Krakow could be present to learn about our history and heritage."²⁵

In another section of her diary, Schenirer expresses that when the rabbi mentioned Yudit, she immediately felt: "that what was missing was that our sisters knew very little about their past, and that this lack was alienating them from our people and its traditions." Schenirer believed that "if our sisters had knowledge of our ancestors and the heroism of our great men and women, it would make a significant difference."

During Flesch's lectures in Vienna, Schenirer was introduced to the works and activities of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch the prominent representative of Orthodox German Jewry. Hirsch's concept of "Torah Im Derech Eretz"²⁶ and his opposition to Haskalah influenced

support to Sarah Schenirer in establishing the Jewish women's education network, Beis Yaakov. The Bais Yaakov Project, "Rabbi Moshe David Flesch" (Access 29 May 2023).

- 21 The term 'Yiddish shul' refers to the synagogue and is derived from the German word 'Schule', meaning 'school'. The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Synagogue", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (Access 23 January 2023).
- 22 Teller, *Builders*, 371.
- 23 Naomi Seidman, "Legitimizing the Revolution: Sarah Schenirer and the Rhetoric of Torah Study for Girls", *New Directions in the History of the Jews in the Polish Lands*, ed. Antony Polonsky vd. (Academic Studies Press, 2018), 358.
- 24 According to the narrative, Holofernes, a commander of Nebuchadnezzar in the 7th-6th century BC, subjugated the Jews who had just returned from the Babylonian Captivity in the 6th century BC. He destroyed their temple, declared that henceforth only Nebuchadnezzar should be worshipped as a god, and laid siege to Bethulia. Due to the lengthy siege, the inhabitants wanted to surrender their city, but Yudit persuaded them to postpone their surrender for five days. He was brought before Holofernes in his camp. On the fourth day, Holofernes decided to seduce Yudit and invited her to his tent. There, he drank more wine than usual and passed out from drunkenness. Yudit then cut off his head with her sword and returned with it to Bethulia. The head of Holofernes was placed outside the city walls by the Jews. The following morning, the Assyrian soldiers learned of their commander-in-chief's death and dispersed. Robert M. Grant vd., "Biblical Literature-Judith, Apocrypha, Heroine", *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Access 13 February 2024).
- 25 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 17.
- 26 In the English translation of the phrase 'Torah and the Way of the Land', 'the Way of the Land' refers to the secular community. Max Levy, "From Torah im Deerekh Eretz to Torah U-Madda: the Legacy of Samson Raphael Hirsch", *Pen History Review* 20/1 (2013), 73-93. For more detailed information, see: Mor-

Schenirer's ideas.²⁷ Schenirer began planning reforms in women's education after being inspired by Flesch's lectures and Hirsch's activities.²⁸ Schenirer's diary reveals that around 1911, before she met Hirsch, she was already considering devoting herself entirely to work among women. Flesch's lectures in Vienna and Hirsch's educational activities influenced Schenirer in putting these ideas into action.²⁹

After the end of the Great War, Schenirer returned to Krakow with her family. However, upon her return, she encountered a group of young people who were following secular trends.³⁰ Schenirer noted that many Jewish girls, who were exposed to modern secular culture and influenced by Marxism and other ideologies, began to question their parents' religious values and traditions. Some even became involved in the growing feminist movement in Poland.³¹

Schenirer was not the first to recognise the problem of assimilating young girls. The issue had been acknowledged before but remained unsolved. In 1903, during a meeting of Polish rabbis in Krakow, a delegate proposed the establishment of schools for girls, highlighting the neglect of their education by his colleagues. However, the proposal was almost unanimously opposed. At the end of the meeting, it was stated that Jewish parents should educate their daughters at home.³² The proposal to open schools was rejected with the following words: "This law (the prohibition of women's Torah study) applies everywhere and at all times, including in our time. And if this law is true and permanent, its application is eternal..."³³

Despite facing repeated indifference from leaders towards the plight of young Jewish girls, Schenirer persistently appealed to influential leaders in the Orthodox community, emphasising the necessity of traditional Jewish education for girls.³⁴ In her diary, the day before returning to Krakow, she expressed her concerns as follows:

"How would my plan to create a religious learning institution for Jewish girls be received in Krakow? I was well aware that people would say: 'Really? In the twentieth century, you want to drag Jewish daughters back to piety and tradition?' However, I also felt a strong urge to revive the dream of a religious girls' school in order to preserve the spirit of ancient Israel and save this generation of Jewish women."³⁵

According to Schenirer, women had to consciously decide to reject the superficially

dechai Breuer, *The "Torah-Im-Derekh-Eretz" of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 1970).

27 Pearl Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart: The Life and Legacy of Sarah Schenirer, Founder and Visionary of the Bais Yaakov Movement* (Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 2003), 22.

28 Polin: Virtual Shtetl, "Mother of Israel: Sara Schenirer" (Access 03 January 2023).

29 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 46.

30 Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart*, 25.

31 Teller, *Builders*, 375.

32 Jewish Action, "A Traditional Revolutionary: Sarah Schenirer's Legacy Revisited" (Access 03 January 2023); The Bais Yaakov Project, "Timeline" (Access 09 January 2023).

33 Iris Brown, "At the Center of Two Revolutions, Beit Yaakov between Neo Orthodoxy and Ultra Orthodoxy", *Polin Studies in Polish Jewry* 33/1 (2022), 343.

34 Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart*, 25.

35 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 245.

alluring but morally empty pleasures of modern life.³⁶ The organisation aimed to provide guidance to women in rejecting superficially alluring but morally empty pleasures of modern life. To guide them in this decision, she organised events where she could meet with them. Later, she established an institutional structure, initially called the Orthodox Girls' Union and later known as Bais Yaakov.³⁷

2.1. Orthodox Girls' Union

In her efforts to reclaim Jewish girls and women and save future generations, Schenirer persisted in the face of opposition and organized the first Oneg Shabbos³⁸ in the spacious auditorium of the Krakow Orphanage. Thanks to the women's efforts, forty girls, mostly between the ages of sixteen and twenty, attended the meeting.³⁹ At the end of the meeting, Schenirer was told that her ideas were old-fashioned and fanciful.⁴⁰ She decided that she would have a better chance of reaching and converting people to the Torah if she started with younger girls instead of teenagers.⁴¹ Schenirer then established a religious school for girls, hoping that elementary school-age students would be more receptive to her efforts.⁴² This decision is recorded in her diary as follows:

“I was dissatisfied with the newly founded Orthodox Girls' Union as they had not yet fully adhered to the commandments of Jewish law and the obligations of the Torah. Convincing the young women, who were already set in their ways, to adopt a new and authentic Jewish lifestyle with its customs and traditions was a challenge. As a result, I began to consider alternative options. To achieve my ideal, it was necessary to start with children, with saplings that could still bend. Only with young children could I perfectly realise my vision.”⁴³

This initiative in November 1916 can be considered the first attempt to establish the Bais Yaakov movement. In her diaries at this stage, Schenirer referred to the organisation she was trying to build as the Union of Orthodox Girls.⁴⁴ This name was not used for a long time. After a short time, the name Bais Yaakov was adopted. The authorship of the “Bais Yaakov” designation is not known, but it is believed that the proposal for the name came from Schenirer⁴⁵ or was given by the Krakow Agudat committee, which had pledged to support the movement in 1919.⁴⁶ The name Bais Yaakov is a combination of Yiddish and Hebrew

36 Jewish Women's Archive, “Agudat Israel”.

37 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 52.

38 Oneg Shabbat, Hebrew for “joy of Shabbat”, is an informal Shabbat (or Friday evening) gathering of Jews in a synagogue or private home to express the joy inherent in Shabbat. The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, “Oneg Shabbat”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Access 17 January 2023).

39 Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart*, 27-29.

40 Teller, *Builders*, 378.

41 Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart*, 33.

42 Rachel Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters: Jewish Women Runaways in Habsburg Galicia* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020), 198.

43 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 249.

44 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 52.

45 Schenirer's preference for this name is on the basis of Rashi's commentary on the passuk. Fabijańczuk, “Mother of Israel: Sara Schenirer”. Rashi's interpretation suggests that ‘the house of Jacob’ refers to women, while ‘the sons of Israel’ refers to men. Seferia, “Rashi on Exodus 19:3:3-4” (Access 02 December 2023).

46 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*; Jewish Women's Archive, “Agudat Israel”.

(sounding) words, sounding like “Beys Yankev” in Yiddish pronunciation and “Beit Yaakov” in Hebrew pronunciation. During the interwar period, when the movement flourished in Poland, the name “Bais Yaakov” was widely used.⁴⁷

During this period, Schenirer founded a club and a library for young women in her community. She introduced them to the works of Samson Raphael Hirsch, Marcus Lehmann, and other similar authors sent from Frankfurt.⁴⁸ Although Schenirer’s initial attempts were only partially successful, her lectures did influence the young women’s religious ideas. However, they still refrained from fulfilling their Orthodox obligations. At this stage, Schenirer realised that a more systematic structure was necessary to reach a greater number of young Jewish girls and to reinforce the impact of her teachings on them.

2.2. Bais Yaakov Schools

Following a relatively unsuccessful start, Sarah Schenirer managed to increase the number of students by implementing methodological changes. Schenirer was determined to open a school to institutionalise her teaching. She wrote to her brother, asking for his support and advice.⁴⁹ Although her brother expressed concern that Schenirer was becoming too politicised, he suggested that they approach the Belzer Rebbe⁵⁰ for his approval. In 1917, Schenirer travelled with her brother to Marienbad to visit Rebbe Yissachar. According to her diary, her brother sent a kvitl⁵¹ to the Rebbe with the inscription “She wants to guide Jewish girls on the path to becoming Jews”.⁵² This brief statement, which deliberately avoided the word ‘school’, was responded to by Yissachar’s words, “May she find favour and succeed!”⁵³ Yissachar later prohibited his Hasidim from sending their daughters to Schenirer’s school, indicating a possible lack of understanding of Schenirer’s proposal. It is worth noting that the Bais Yaakov did not become a Belzer school, as Belz initially kept its distance from the movement, which had Rebbe Yissachar’s approval.⁵⁴

In 1917, when Schenirer founded the first Bais Yaakov school, the idea of establishing a network of schools to educate women was radical in the Eastern European Orthodox Jewish community.⁵⁵ Traditionally, women’s religious education had been provided at home. Schenirer understood that gaining the support of local leaders was crucial for the acceptance and spread of this idea. Indeed, Schenirer’s success was largely attributed to the support she received from local leaders. For instance, in 1918 and 1933, Rabbi Israel HaCohen, also

47 Lisek, “Orthodox Yiddishism in Beys Yakov Magazine in the Context of Religious Jewish Feminism in Poland”, 127.

48 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 249.

49 Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters*, 198.

50 Shalom Rokeach (1781-1855) was the founder of the Belz (Polish, Belz) dynasty and the first rabbi of Belz, a town in western Ukraine. He was succeeded by his youngest son, Yehoshua Rokeach (1825-1894), He was the Third Belzer Rebbe who approved Schenirer’s initiative in Marienbad in 1917. Assaf David, “Belz Hasidic Dynasty”, *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (Access 12 February 2023).

51 In Hasidic tradition, a kvitl is a petition presented to a rabbi, often placed near the tomb of a saint or between the stones of the Western Wall. This act is seen as a demonstration of loyalty to the Hasidic rebbe. Adele Berlin (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of the Jewish religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47.

52 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 250.

53 Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters*, 199.

54 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 36.

55 Schupak, “Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women Performing Gender in Julius Caesar”, 160.

known as the Chofetz Chaim, made the following statement regarding Schenirer's efforts:

"Schenirer and her helpers' endeavour is important in combating heresy and protecting Jewish souls. It is recommended that those interested in religious education enrol their daughters in such a school. Concerns about the prohibition against teaching daughters Torah should not be a hindrance. This is not the place to provide a detailed explanation, as our current times differ greatly from those of the past. The situation has changed due to our numerous sins. Therefore, it is crucial to establish as many schools as possible and make every effort to save those who can still be saved."⁵⁶

Under the leadership of Sarah Schenirer, the Bais Yaakov movement rapidly gained popularity among local leaders and was eventually adopted by Agudat Israel,⁵⁷ the new political organization of world Orthodox Jewry. During the first planning meeting of the Krakow Agudat in 1919, representatives made the decision to include the Bais Yaakov as a regular part of their activities, marking the movement's first official adoption by Agudat Israel.⁵⁸ Following the adoption of the movement by Agudat in 1923, Bais Yaakov schools were staffed by educators and administrators from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.⁵⁹

That same year, the Agudat movement took partial financial responsibility for Bais Yaakov, allocating part of the funds collected by the party's Keren ha-Tora (Torah Fund) to support the Bais Yaakov schools.⁶⁰ At this stage, it can be argued that Agudat Israel's support had a political aspect in relation to the granting of the right to vote to women in Poland in 1918. Namely: Agudat Israel, as a political party in the Polish parliament, wanted to win the votes of women who were granted the right to vote in 1918.⁶¹ The collaboration between Schenirer and Agudat Israel has contributed to the expansion of the Bais Yaakov school network. The Bais Yaakov movement operated through three main centres simultaneously: the headquarters in Krakow, the *Bais Yaakov Journal* office in Lodz, and the Warsaw office, which collaborated with the Hovev organisation in dealing with government officials.⁶²

Under Schenirer's leadership, the movement grew to 49 schools and 6585 students in 1925.⁶³ The schools' curriculum comprised of the Torah, with commentaries by Rashi and Hirsch, the Neviim, and ethical teachings in Pirkei Avot.⁶⁴ Although Schenirer studied Talmud through her father⁶⁵, it was not deemed appropriate for girls to study Talmud in the

56 Seidman, "Legitimizing the Revolution", 361-362.

57 Agudat Israel is a political movement of Orthodox Jews that was founded in May 1912 at a conference in Kattowitz in the Germany (now Katowice, Poland). Its aim is to preserve the traditional Jewish way of life and counter the influence of secular or competing religious ideologies. The movement's innovative approach is particularly evident in its religious education of women and youth activities. During the interwar period, the party focused its activities on both political and educational fields in Poland. Gershon Bacon, "Agudas Yisroel", *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (Access 26 May 2023).

58 Jewish Women's Archive, "Agudat Israel".

59 Seidman, "Legitimizing the Revolution", 360.

60 Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart*, 57.

61 The Lehrhaus, "Sarah Schenirer and Innovative Change: The Myths and Facts" (Access 14 August 2017).

62 Jewish Women's Archive, "Agudat Israel".

63 Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart*, 98.

64 Almog - Perry-Hazan, "The Ability to Claim and the Opportunity to Imagine: Rights Consciousness and the Education of Ultra-Orthodox Girls", 278.

65 Schenirer's diary states: "I took it upon myself to read the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Mishnah and

Bais Yaakov schools she founded.⁶⁶ Schenirer deliberately chose to limit the school's curriculum, making it easier to gain the approval of local leaders.

Until 1926, Bais Yaakov schools exclusively used *Yahadus* (Judaism) by N. Kaminitz as their textbook. Despite having 49 schools at that time, the only available study materials for the children were the prayer book and the Torah. Sarah Schenirer's writings were handwritten by the teachers during this period.⁶⁷

By the 1930s, the Bais Yaakov movement had expanded to encompass approximately 200 schools and 38,000 pupils in Poland and beyond. The schools in small towns served as supplementary institutions, providing religious education exclusively. They offered half-day religious education, complementing the public schools and enabling pupils to avoid the religious education provided by the public schools.⁶⁸ In larger cities, full-day schools were established. Financial support for these schools came from *kehillas* (ie communities),⁶⁹ municipal councils, and tuition fees.⁷⁰ The curriculum included the prayer book, the Torah, basic Jewish law, history, Hebrew, Yiddish, and ethics. A third type of school, the Bais Yaakov vocational school, emerged in the last few years before World War II. For example, E.G. Friedenson opened a trade school in Lodz called *Ohel Sarah* (Sarah's Tent). The school provided training in tailoring, accountancy, and nursing to approximately three hundred students, primarily from small, impoverished towns.⁷¹

The Bais Yaakov movement suffered greatly during the Holocaust. When war broke out, the school in Krakow was forced to close, but Bais Yaakov teachers continued to work in cities and ghettos, often clandestinely and occasionally with official sanction, operating soup kitchens, orphanages, and schools.⁷² Between 1918 and 1939, most students and teachers associated with Bais Yaakov lost their lives. After the war, Bais Yaakov was re-established in the United States, Israel, and Europe. The movement then shifted its focus to preserving tradition, rather than Schenirer's original goal of bridging tradition and modernity.⁷³

When Agudat Israel introduced the idea of girls' education from Europe, it was considered radical and too modern. However, Agudat gained strength and in 1933, Agudat activist Meir Sharansky founded the first Bais Yaakov in Tel Aviv.⁷⁴

the Talmud every day, and I enjoyed it immensely." Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 243.

66 Almog - Perry-Hazan, "The Ability to Claim and the Opportunity to Imagine: Rights Consciousness and the Education of Ultra-Orthodox Girls", 278.

67 Abraham Atkin, *The Beth Jacob Movement in Poland (1917-1939)* (New York: Yeshiva University, PhD thesis, 1959), 103.

68 Naomi Seidman, "A Revolution in the Name of Tradition: Orthodoxy and Torah Study for Girls", *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry Volume 30: Jewish Education in Eastern Europe*, ed. Eliyana Adler-Antony Polonsky (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 231.

69 Jewish communities living in a city or town or under the supervision of a local authority are usually called "Kehilla". Yusuf Besalel, "Kehilla", *Yahudilik Ansiklopedisi K - R* (Istanbul: Gözlem, 2001), 2:460.

70 Iris Brown, "Two Waves of Debate over Sara Schenirer's Legacy and the Beit Ya'akov Approach", *Studies in Judaism, Humanities, and the Social Sciences* 4/1 (01 January 2022), 251.

71 Jewish Women's Archive, "Agudat Israel".

72 The Bais Yaakov Project, "Timeline".

73 "Schenirer, Sarah", *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Access 31 December 2022).

74 The Bais Yaakov Project, "Timeline".

The first Bais Yaakov in America was established in Williamsburg, Brooklyn in 1937. From there, the Bais Yaakov became widely known as the Beth Jacob schools. Today, these schools exist in Britain, Europe, South Africa, Australia, and South America.⁷⁵ In 1937, on the eve of the Second World War, 250 Beit Yaakov schools were established in Europe and the United States, educating 38,000 girls.⁷⁶ Schenirer's memoirs state that restoring Orthodox girls to their religious identity required establishing a school and reaching out to the younger generation through lectures, the youth movement, the library, and publications.⁷⁷ The Bais Yaakov was accompanied by many complementary subsidiary organizations due to the rapidly growing number of students and schools: The Bnos Agudat Israel, Bais Yaakov Teachers' College, and two student periodicals, *The Bais Yaakov Journal* and *The Kindergarten*.

3. An Overview of the Basic Characteristics of Sarah Schenirer and Bais Yaakov

Schenirer attempted to restore the lost importance of traditional structure through modern educational methods in the schools she established for young girls. She aimed to revitalize tradition by rebuilding girls' ties to the past while also calling for change in a highly conservative society. Indeed, Sarah Schenirer's students and Bais Yaakov publications emphasised her internalisation of traditional Jewish values such as *tzeniut*⁷⁸ and her adherence to *da'at Torah*.⁷⁹ Schenirer had no political ambitions and was solely focused on educational matters. She always consulted with rabbis before taking any action. Her deliberate and careful approach was aimed at reassuring the Ultra-Orthodox public, particularly men, that their status would not be threatened by any of her activities.⁸⁰ In her writings, she stated that Torah study was a supreme value for women, as it was for all Jews.⁸¹ However, she did not mention passages in the Talmud that were unfavourable to women's Torah study.⁸² This deliberate choice aimed to avoid confrontation with local leaders and gain their approval.

Working with the religious establishment, Schenirer was able to expand the boundaries in an ultra-Orthodox community that sought to protect itself from secular influences. To create role models for her students, she highlighted women from Jewish history and presented an ideal of the Jewish woman that combined modernity and traditionalism.⁸³

75 Deborah Weissman-Lauren Granite, "Bais Ya'akov Schools", *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, ed. Jennifer Sartori (Access 28 January 2023).

76 Tamar El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant: Ultraorthodox Jewish Women and Their World* (USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 68.

77 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 52.

78 Humility, simplicity, shyness, and timidity are the primary meanings of this concept. Sometimes, above these meanings, it implies intimacy. This concept is the hallmark of Jewish marriage, and the rabbis refer to it as the special quality to look for in the ideal mate. My Jewish Learning, "Modesty (Tzniut)" (Access 16 January 2023).

79 The doctrine, commonly associated with the political movement of Orthodox Jews, Agudat Israel, attributes to rabbis the authority to decide both secular and spiritual matters. Gershon Bacon, "Daas Toyre", *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (Access 03 February 2023); Seidman, "Legitimizing the Revolution", 360.

80 Shaul, "The Legacy of Sarah Schenirer and the Rebuilding of Ultraorthodox Society after the Holocaust", 250.

81 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 37.

82 Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*, 40-42.

83 Cohn, "Feminine Identity in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women's Contemporary Art", 243.

Schenirer's "ideal of the Jewish woman" is based on motherhood. According to the speaker, motherhood is a woman's vocation and her most important purpose in life.⁸⁴ The aim of Bais Yaakov's education is to train Orthodox Jewish women who, in addition to being wives and mothers, pursue careers outside the home, fulfill mitzvot, and support their husbands in Torah study.⁸⁵

The change initiated under Schenirer's leadership had a far-reaching impact, not only on girls but also on the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community's structure. The destruction of yeshivas by the Nazis after the Holocaust prompted rabbis to make fundamental changes. Traditionally, only a small minority of men who had to work to provide for their families were able to devote their lives to full-time Talmudic study. However, the intention of the change was to enable all Ultra-Orthodox men to devote their lives to Talmudic study, thus creating a "Community of Learners".⁸⁶ This community, which is now considered the traditional social organization of the Ultra-Orthodox community, did not exist in Israel until the 1950s. In early Ultra-Orthodox communities, men would study until marriage and then leave the yeshiva to find employment and support their families.⁸⁷ Therefore, marriage was a significant challenge for Ultra-Orthodox men before the 1950s, as it necessitated leaving the yeshiva and beginning to provide for a family.⁸⁸ Women who found jobs through the vocational classes offered at Bais Yaakov took on the financial burden of the household, enabling their husbands to devote time to studying Torah. Today, Ultra-Orthodox education for girls is an important part of building a "Community of Learners" in Israel. The wives' salaries have facilitated their husbands' capacity to devote time to religious studies.

Bais Yaakov places the responsibility on its female graduates to support their families financially.⁸⁹ As a result, there has been a shift in the domestic division of labour, with Ultra-Orthodox men taking on a larger share of household chores to enable their wives to study or work to some extent.⁹⁰ This change has been acknowledged by some scholars as a "feminist" influence of Bais Yaakov and Schenirer on the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community.⁹¹

Taking into account the social and cultural context of Schenirer's time, her relationship with feminism is a topic of controversy. The Bais Yaakov movement aimed to promote religious education for Jewish girls, and Schenirer acted in accordance with this goal. At this point we can have a look at the changes in women's education and social roles in relation to feminism. However, it would be inaccurate to consider Schenirer as the pioneer of a feminist movement. Feminism was a new concept in Schenirer's time, and although she

84 Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart*, 92.

85 My Jewish Learning, "Bais Ya'akov Schools" (Access 16 January 2023).

86 Schupak, "Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women Performing Gender in Julius Caesar", 161.

87 Giorgia Foscari, "Ultra-orthodox Jewish Women Go to Work", *Annali di Ca' Foscari Serie orientale* 50/1 (2014), 57.

88 Almog - Perry-Hazan, "The Ability to Claim and the Opportunity to Imagine: Rights Consciousness and the Education of Ultra-Orthodox Girls", 281.

89 Almog - Perry-Hazan, "The Ability to Claim and the Opportunity to Imagine: Rights Consciousness and the Education of Ultra-Orthodox Girls", 281.

90 Schupak, "Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women Performing Gender in Julius Caesar", 161.

91 Ilan Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study: Orthodox Religious Education and Modernity* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 66.

expressed opposition to it in her diary, she valued the education and personal development of women and encouraged their active participation in society.

Another factor that contributed to the Bais Yaakov becoming an essential part of Ultra-Orthodox life was the State funding of Bais Yaakov institutions. This funding provided many young Ultra-Orthodox women with a regular salary and favourable working hours.⁹² Bais Yaakov training programmes offered girls the opportunity to take the Ministry of Labour's certification examinations, which officially recognised their ability to practice their trained profession. However, criticism has been directed towards the limited range of professions available to women. Bais Yaakov institutions offered vocational training courses in teaching, computerised clerical work, accounting, nursing, and interior design.⁹³ Critics argue that these schools received state funding and operate outside the official curriculum, which they see as an integration of religion into state affairs and contrary to the principle of secularism. The argument that religious schools are important for protecting religious freedom is often used in response to criticisms.

Another issue with Bais Yaakov is gender inequality in education. Tamar El-Or, who researched the education of Ultra-Orthodox women, first used the term “educated and ignorant” to describe this problem. This paradox can be expressed as follows: The Ultra-Orthodox community places great emphasis on educating girls, but their approach is often limited to promoting the stereotype of an ignorant woman whose sole responsibility is to care for her children and home. Women's education system opens certain doors for them and takes care to keep others closed. Therefore, by Ultra-Orthodox standards, a woman cannot be perceived as educated.⁹⁴

According to the paradox referred to as “educated and ignorant” by El-Or, Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women were taught the religious practices they were expected to fulfil, as well as their role in the family and community. However, they were not taught Jewish scripture, particularly the Talmud. This was a deliberate decision made by Schenirer to maintain a clear distinction between the education of girls and boys.⁹⁵ The opening of the Bais Yaakov girls' schools in the twentieth century was a significant advancement for women's religious education in the Ultra-Orthodox community. However, the in-depth study of the Talmud and Jewish law, which are the most important and prestigious areas of Torah study, remained exclusive to men.⁹⁶ Therefore, the boundaries of this field, which are inaccessible and forbidden to women, have become clear once again. Some individuals view the Bais Yaakov movement as a temporary solution to the spiritual decline of recent generations, rather than a revolution in gender roles or women's education.⁹⁷ Naomi Seidman argues that the Bais Yaakov schools did not create female equivalents to their educated male counterparts, but instead established a distinct culture of gendered learning practices.⁹⁸

92 Fuchs, *Jewish women's Torah study*, 65.

93 Foscarini, “Ultra-orthodox Jewish Women Go to Work”, 63.

94 El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant*, 111.

95 Seidman, “Legitimizing the Revolution”, 359.

96 Iris Brown Hoizman, “A Haredi Myth of Female Leadership: Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky”, *Religions* 13/4 (24 March 2022), 276.

97 For example A. Wolf, R Karelitz. see. Fuchs, *Jewish women's Torah study*, 66.

98 Seidman, “Legitimizing the Revolution”, 360.

Bais Yaakov schools have undergone variations worldwide due to economic pressures and ideological shifts. Some schools promote university preparatory curricula while others prohibit it.⁹⁹

Sarah Schenirer has been described as a “revolutionary” in some works. If we use the term “revolutionary” to describe a leader who seeks to bring about radical and fundamental changes in the social or religious sphere, it may be difficult to consider Sarah Schenirer as such. The Bais Yaakov movement was founded on traditional Jewish values with the aim of promoting religious education for Jewish girls. Schenirer acted within this framework and took initiatives to provide access to religious education for women and encourage their active participation in the community. For instance, in Schenirer’s community, single girls were not permitted to attend synagogue on Shabbat. Schenirer believed that it was essential for the spiritual growth of her students to participate in a minyan and started taking them with her to synagogue. Although Schenirer’s activities were innovative, she did not aim to alter the status of women in Orthodox society. Instead, she stressed the significance of preserving traditional ‘feminine’ values, such as modesty, humility, and motherhood. Although the author attempted to legitimise the idea of innovation within Ultra-Orthodoxy for young girls, the lack of details regarding this initiative and its impact on Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women today raises questions about this characterization.

Conclusion

Prior to Sarah Schenirer, Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women did not receive formal or systematic Jewish religious education. They learned basic Jewish concepts and halakha, which they were obliged to observe, informally from their families. Formal Jewish religious education for women is a twentieth-century phenomenon that began with Sarah Schenirer’s founding of Bais Yaakov. Bais Yaakov’s educational system for girls was established in Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its aim was to enable girls to retain their Jewish identity while gaining a place in society. Since then, it has steadily developed and expanded to its present status. Today, Bais Yaakov operates through many institutions and activities that provide religious, moral, and cultural education for girls. The Bais Yaakov movement was founded to provide formal religious education for Orthodox girls, helping them to preserve their identity and faith while reducing their exposure to secular influences.

Sarah Schenirer is widely regarded as an example of how to bring about change in a systematic and appropriate way for girls’ religious education. This achievement is one of the most successful innovations for women in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism in the last century. Sarah Schenirer remained committed to the Ultra-Orthodox community while pushing the boundaries and legitimising change by balancing tradition and innovation. Her success ultimately led to a change in the way rabbis and leaders viewed girls’ education.

Today, there is some criticism of Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov movement. Critics argue that the movement restricts women and reinforces traditional gender roles. Women can receive religious education in a systematic structure with the leadership of Sarah Sche-

99 Weissman - Granite, “Bais Ya’akov Schools”.

nirer, but the content of this education is still limited. In Ultra-Orthodoxy, in-depth study of the Torah and Talmud is still the domain of men.

Sarah Schenirer and Bais Yaakov are considered the beginning of significant changes in the lives of both women and men within Ultra-Orthodox Judaism. The role of women in the transmission of religious knowledge and the importance of religious education in this role suggest that the subject of Jewish women's religious education in Ultra-Orthodoxy is much broader and ripe for further research.

Extended Abstract

Sarah Schenirer, a pioneering Jewish educator, significantly transformed the landscape of Jewish education for women in the early 20th century. Born in 1883 in Kraków, Poland, Schenirer was deeply concerned about the lack of formal Jewish education for girls in her community. At a time when Jewish boys had access to comprehensive religious instruction, girls were often left with minimal or no structured education, a gap Schenirer was determined to fill.

Schenirer's upbringing in a traditional Jewish family instilled in her a strong sense of religious commitment. However, as she grew older, she observed that many young Jewish women were increasingly disengaged from their faith, largely due to their lack of understanding and connection to Jewish traditions and teachings. While boys were sent to cheder and yeshiva, receiving extensive instruction in Jewish texts, girls were largely excluded from formal religious education. This disparity troubled Schenirer, especially as she observed the growing secularisation among Jewish women who were increasingly influenced by broader societal changes and less connected to their religious roots. Witnessing this drift from religious life deeply troubled Schenirer and spurred her into action.

Inspired by the lectures of Dr. Samson Raphael Hirsch and the educational philosophy of the Orthodox Jewish community in Frankfurt, Schenirer became convinced that the answer lay in creating formal schools for girls. In 1917, Schenirer initiated the establishment of the inaugural Bais Yaakov school in Kraków. This institution aimed to provide Jewish girls with a rigorous education that encompassed both religious and secular studies. Schenirer's innovative approach was to combine traditional Jewish values with a modern educational framework, thus ensuring that young women received a well-rounded and meaningful education. The initial class consisted of just 25 girls, but it marked the beginning of a revolutionary movement.

Sarah Schenirer encountered numerous challenges, including scepticism and opposition from segments of the traditional Jewish community who were wary of change. Schenirer encountered significant obstacles in the pursuit of her mission. Many traditionalists were sceptical or outright opposed to the idea of formal education for girls, fearing that it would result in a departure from traditional roles and values. Schenirer's response was characterised by patience and persuasive argumentation, frequently invoking religious texts and precedents in support of her cause. Over time, her unwavering advocacy and the undeniable success of her students helped to alleviate much of this opposition. Nevertheless, her unwavering dedication and the tangible success of her educational model

gradually won over many of her critics. Schenirer's endeavours not only augmented the educational prospects for Jewish women but also enabled them to assume active and informed roles within their communities.

Schenirer's educational philosophy was predicated on the conviction that Jewish women should be well-versed in their faith and capable of making meaningful contributions to both their communities and the wider world. The Bais Yaakov curriculum reflected this dual focus. The curriculum at Bais Yaakov included the study of Hebrew, Torah, Jewish laws, and customs, in addition to general subjects such as mathematics, history, and literature. The curriculum's core elements included Torah study, Jewish laws (Halacha), customs (Minhagim), Jewish history, and the Hebrew language. Schenirer underscored the significance of comprehending and embodying the tenets of the faith, with the objective of fostering a profound and intimate connection to Jewish traditions. In recognition of the importance of a comprehensive education, Schenirer incorporated subjects such as mathematics, science, literature, and history.

Schenirer's rationale for this dual framework was that it would enable girls to develop a strong Jewish identity and be better equipped to navigate the modern world without losing their religious heritage.

The initial success of the first Bais Yaakov school led to the establishment of additional schools across Poland, with the network eventually expanding to other countries. Parents and community leaders were quick to recognise the positive impact of this education on their daughters. Schenirer's innovative model led to the establishment of additional Bais Yaakov schools across Poland and subsequently throughout Europe. By the 1930s, the Bais Yaakov network had expanded significantly, with thousands of students enrolled in schools throughout Europe. Schenirer's model proved so effective that it was adapted and implemented in Jewish communities worldwide, creating a lasting legacy that endures to this day.

Sarah Schenirer's pioneering work through the Bais Yaakov movement has had a profound and enduring impact on the field of Jewish education for women. The continued success of Bais Yaakov schools worldwide is a testament to the remarkable contributions made by Schenirer to Jewish education and her enduring legacy as a trailblazer in the field. Bais Yaakov schools are currently established in numerous countries, including the United States.

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