

WASHINGTON DATELINE

By TRUDE B. FELDMAN
ISRAELITE'S WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT

First Woman Rabbi

The first woman rabbi in the history of American Judaism was ordained in the 107-year-old Plum Street Reform Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio, last month.

The idea, of course, is far from winning acceptance even in Reform Judaism, not to mention the Conservative and Orthodox community.

In a most revealing interview in the June issue of Ladies Home Journal, Sally Priesand -- who will also be the world's first practicing woman rabbi -- talks about her personal feelings on current issues, such as the prayer amendment to the Constitution, Judeo-Christian relations, intermarriage, premarital relations, and birth control.

On the prayer amendment to the Constitution "Rabbi Sally" -- as she is called -- said that the "ruling presently in effect does not forbid silent prayer in the schools. If the parents want their children to begin the day with a prayer, let them pray before they leave home."

As for Judeo-Christian relations, the 25-year-old rabbi said: "The Christian tradition is based on love; Jesus preached it and he lived it. The Jewish tradition is based on 'Tzedakah' (righteousness), a concept that demands social sensitivity. If only we lived by those two concepts, then we might indeed turn our joint attention to the real issues of today."

On intermarriage between a Jew and a non-Jew, "Rabbi Sally" emphasized: "I will not perform any wedding ceremony until I have met with the couple and know them fairly well. Each situation will demand a separate decision."

On premarital relations, the first woman rabbi said that a decision should be up to the individual. "They should be aware of what they are doing and be sure they are not using one another as objects."

On birth control: "Information and devices

should be made available to all who want them. I myself like large families and would even consider adopting children if I should remain single..."

Evan Frances, Special Projects Editor of LADIES HOME JOURNAL, went to Cincinnati to interview "Rabbi Sally" for the Journal. While there she met Sherry Levy, Sally's room mate for the last 4 years. Mrs. Frances discovered that not only is Sherry of the Jewish faith herself, about the same age as Sally, but very close to her as well.

Because Mrs. Frances wanted LADIES HOME JOURNAL readers to get as much out of the article as possible, she asked Sherry to write a story that she could edit.

"It takes a peer to know a peer," Mrs. Frances said.

While spending time at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati with Sally and her male classmates on research for the article, Mrs. Frances got the feeling that they "Profoundly believe" in Judaism.

"I found the students incredibly erudite, articulate and forthright," she related in an interview at The mayflower Hotel here. "They don't blindly accept answers, but they question everything; and because they do, theirs is never a blind faith."

Mrs. Frances added that her numerous discussions with Sally, Sherry and Sally's fellow students at the college reinforced her feeling that "not only is religion not dead, but that for those who truly believe, it is more potent than ever before."

"Even if it's true that there seem to be fewer Jews and or Christians who practice their religion in the traditional sense," Mrs. Frances noted, "it's certainly true that those who do subscribe to their religion find it the most potent force in their lives."

In the LADIES HOME JOURNAL article, Sherry Levy, who teaches English Literature at the University of Cincinnati, describes "Rabbi Sally" as an alert, All-American girl.

"She understands life, respects it, loves it, and lives it fully. This could make her a great rabbi as well as the first woman rabbi..."

According to John Mack Carter, Editor, LADIES HOME JOURNAL, a reading of the article on "Rabbi Sally" in the June issue should be gratifying to all those who believe in the widening roles and opportunities for women.

After an 8-year struggle, filled with determination, Sally Priesand will begin her career by serving as Assistant Rabbi at New York's Stephen Wise Free Synagogue on August 1st.

On a recent visit to Washington, D.C., "Rabbi Sally" was asked why she had chosen to become a rabbi.

"I have faith in God, faith in the worth of the individual, and faith in Judaism as a way of life," she responded. "I believe that Judaism is worth preserving and the rabbinate is the

best way I can live up to such convictions. I have deep feelings for Judaism and I think -- as a rabbi -- I can best impart those feelings to other people."

Her definition of an all-around good rabbi is one who is able to teach and preach; counsel and lead, and preserve Judaism as a way of life.

When, as student rabbi, Sally was criticized for wearing a mini skirt under her clergy robe on the pulpit, she explained that it's possible to function both as a rabbi and as a woman.

On her own marriage plans, "Rabbi Sally" said that anyone she would consider would have to realize how much the rabbinate means to her. However, she doesn't expect to marry a rabbi.

As for children interfering with her clergy-woman's life, "Rabbi Sally" quipped: "I can even envision a nursery next to my study. A rabbi can have children too..."

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