A center of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC), Jews from all affiliations – Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Modern Orthodox, and unaffiliated – participate in and support Kolot’s programs, which include:

- **scholarship** that offers new critical perspectives from which to appreciate the diversity of Jewish experience and analyze the Jewish past, present, and future

- **training rabbis** and other Jewish leaders at RRC

- **ritualwell.org**, a website created with Ma’yan: The Jewish Women’s Project, that enables Jews to mark lifecycle events and celebrate holidays with contemporary rituals

- **Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing!**, an informal program operated with local Jewish institutions from coast to coast that strengthens the self-esteem, leadership skills, and Jewish identity of adolescent girls
Judaism is a vibrant conversation between the past, present and future about how to live our lives and create a better world for ourselves and our children.

Until the last century, this conversation was almost exclusively between men. Turn to any page of Talmud and you can see this for yourself. Now, women have added their voices to the conversation.

Kolot convenes, researches, creates, and distributes the best of what this conversation has to offer.

With your help, Kolot is creating new expressions of Judaism, built on tradition, that are meaningful to those of us who live in the 21st century – and will shape Jewish practice for the next generation.

- **Keeping girls healthy and Jewish** is at the heart of *Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing!*, an informal education program that combines popular girl culture with the traditional new moon holiday.

  This year we doubled the number of groups being operated by local partners from across denominations. Now 80 groups of adolescent girls are meeting monthly with Kolot-trained leaders in synagogues, JCCs, and other agencies across North America. Some of the groups are new and some are returning for their second, third and fourth years.

- **Helping Jews – affiliated and unaffiliated** – add meaningful and holy Jewish lifecycle and holiday celebrations to their lives is the goal of Ritualwell.org. This unique online resource, created with Ma’yan, is meeting the needs of the thousands of men and women who access our site each month, including many who write to us of their appreciation.

  And the site meets the sophisticated demands of today’s Jewish community – as evidenced by our nomination for a “Webby Award,” the internet Oscar.

- **Providing the Jewish community with Jewish leaders** – men and women – who are fluent in the language of gender studies as it relates to both study and practice is at the core of our work **training rabbis at RRC**.

  We teach rabbinical students to read text with a gender lens, lead prayer using feminine God language, address domestic violence, and offer pastoral care for women with breast cancer.

  The conversation Kolot facilitates is critical – and it is growing.

We thank those of you who participate with us by giving your wisdom, time, and money. Your voice is unique and we value it.

And to those just learning about Kolot, we welcome you into our conversation.

With thanks,

Sally Gottesman
Advisory Board Chair

Deborah Meyer
Managing Director
The Jewish Woman: Somebody, Nobody, and the Body of the Tradition


Lori Lefkovitz

My wish is that we will discover in Judaism a resource for health and gratitude, a tradition that makes us mindful of the body’s holiness, in awe of human potential in each life moment and in all of the body’s variety, respectful of the low falling breasts that nourished life or the map of experiences that lines our faces, humbled by our shared mortality, sympathetic, reverent, tolerant, and with a perspective that puts us in proper human scale, each body so very tiny in the scope of the cosmos, and each body a universe unto itself, so very much more grand and intricately designed than, say, the snowflake, itself a minor miracle.

I should like us to come to feel personal ownership of the Jewish tradition, prepared to find in Jewish texts, law, mythology, and history every-thing that we might ever need to accept and value ourselves, whole and integrated in our bodies, able to honor the bodies of Jewish women and girls appropriately and meaningfully, creatively, and completely.

Why not? After all, despite the reality of aches and pains, cellulite or freckles, our bodies are as much figments of our imagination as they are material facts. As much as we are born into the world out of a maternal body so too are we birthed by culture, by the images that pervade our lived reality and by the storybook characters that populate our fantasies.

Humanity may have been created by God in the divine image, but surely as powerful as God in shaping our body image is Calvin Klein and Slim Fast, fashion industries and diet industries,
Hollywood and romances, forces that I daresay invent and reinvent the female body as surely as some marketer invented cellulite so that we may purchase its remedy.

The idealized Sleeping Beauty or Snow White of the Disneyfied fairytale is what most little girls eagerly anticipate for themselves, a real self in her future, someone whom she will become. She applies lipstick and tries, prematurely, to be grown up; she is a deferred self. Meanwhile, as she waits impatiently to become herself, her mother applies line-erasing creams and tries to return to the self that she imagines she has lost. Girls and women forever struggle to get to the body of a fantastic ideal moment on life’s timeline. We do a disservice to ourselves and our talented Creator when we imaginatively recreate ourselves as statues and fragments, still lives, rather than human beings.

If we turn to Judaism as an alternative system of meaning and ask about beauty, what do we discover? Does Judaism support our resistance to dangerous beauty or does Judaism also promote self-dislike? The right answer is “both.” On the other hand, the principle of humanity made in divine image dictates self-appreciation, and the tradition abounds in stories of self-care, treating the body as a holy temple.

On the other hand, Judaism contains a strong thread that treats the female body as a vessel, a temptation, at once beautiful and desirable and at the same time the site of sin, shame, and impurity.

Historically, from Sarah’s desert tent to the Jerusalem Temple and from the medieval synagogue to the modern yeshiva, the Jewish woman has been partitioned to the side or she was absent altogether, a missing or marginal presence in those places most uniquely Jewish and most highly esteemed. Latecomers to Torah learning and leadership, we are still playing an uneasy game of catch-up, often not quite comfortable on the bima or wrapped in a tallit.

Sanctification is how we rescue ourselves from life’s randomness. With thoughtful intention, love, community, and traditions of ritual and prayer, we mark our days and find support. Each of us, whether Judaism chose us or we chose Judaism, embodies the Jewish past and carries that vitality into the future.

We can find in Judaism sources of self-esteem and pride, opportunities for developing human relationships in the family and with friends, and values education on the importance of caring for the environment, human life everywhere, and our selves. Women are learning that it is possible to be at once critical and loving, to take the best of our heritage and reclaim it for ourselves by finding ways to meaningfully incorporate Jewish practices into our lives.

**Ad-dressing the Body**

Kolot’s RRC College Program Committee explored Judaism and the body in 2002-2003.

The student-faculty committee organized pastoral education workshops for rabbinical students on eating disorders, breast cancer, and transgender issues, and a fashion show examining appearance, authority, and gender. The committee also sponsored a text study and performance piece on gender issues in the Hanukkah story by Mistabra, The Center for Jewish Textual Activism.

**Israeli fiction writer and gay activist David Ehrlich, the October 2002 Henny Wenkart Writer-in-Residence, gave a public reading and conducted a private writing workshop for rabbinical students.**
Thousands of web surfers are celebrating Jewish holidays and marking lifecycle events with resources from www.ritualwell.org, a website Kolot developed in cooperation with Ma’yan, the Jewish Women’s Project of the JCC in Manhattan. The site:

- provides users with quality resources for contemporary Jewish liturgy and ritual
- empowers Jews to use Jewish ritual and liturgy in their homes and communities
- uses the internet to connect Jews to a living Judaism

Ritualwell.org now offers more than 700 innovative rituals for web users, including prayers, explanations of traditional ceremonies, recipes, songs, and articles.

Creative wedding and commitment ceremonies are among the resources you can find on ritualwell.org.

“Ritualwell.org was nominated in 2003 for a Webby, the ‘on-line Oscar,’” in the Best Spirituality Website category.

“We are honored that ritualwell is the first Jewish website to be nominated for a Webby. The site offers a unique perspective on Judaism and it puts the tools to create a personal, meaningful Judaism in the hands of each person who visits it,” said Kolot Advisory Board member and ritualwell.org contributor, Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin.

To make your ritualwell experience even better, in 2003-2004 we will redesign the site to improve its look and navigation. We’ll add a better search function to produce more thorough search results, and we’ll add more material. Please visit the site regularly to see our updates.
Havdalah: A Time of Separation and Renewal

From the Shabbat section of ritualwell.org

Havdalah “separates” Shabbat and the week. The concepts and the symbols of the ceremony lend themselves to a variety of lifecycle events.

Our family has integrated special havdalah ceremonies into all crises and turning points in our lives:

■ We gathered to say havdalah with my father as he lay dying in the intensive care unit.
■ My classmates from Hebrew Union College and our families performed a havdalah ceremony the night before our graduation and entry to the world of Jewish professionals.
■ We named my granddaughter at havdalah.
■ We marked the end of shiva for my mother at a havdalah ceremony in her garden at the same time that we did a pidyon ha ben ceremony for the newest of her great grandchildren.
■ We marked the bonding of two friends embarking on a life together.
■ We released my husband’s spirit at the end of shiva under the stars and trees of our yard.

Marcia Cohn Spiegel
used by permission of the author

Using Ritualwell

Looking for new ideas to celebrate holidays or make your special events more meaningful?

Create your own ritual by copying and pasting resources from the website into a word processing document. Overviews of some of our more popular rituals can guide you in making your ceremony.

Share your rituals and experiences with the ritualwell.org community.

“I am holding an impromptu healing ceremony for a dear friend who has been hospitalized for weeks. I found several resources from the site that will be useful.”

— Youngsville, NY

“This is exactly the kind of resource I’d been searching for. I hope as my knowledge and spirituality grows, I will be contributing along with all these amazing people!”

— Nelson, BC

Many of the resources we have on our site come from users. If you create a ritual that you think may be helpful to others, please send it to us.

When you log on to www.ritualwell.org you have the opportunity to “Join the Community.” Simply fill out the online form with your email address and we’ll send you quarterly e-mail updates with hotlinks to innovative rituals for upcoming holidays and the newest additions to our site.
Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing!
is an informal Jewish program that strengthens the self-esteem, leadership skills, and Jewish identity of girls in grades 6-12 through monthly celebrations of the New Moon festival.

“Everything we talk about I later think about.”
“It really means something to be Jewish here.”
“In the group we celebrate the fact that we’re girls.”
— voices of participating girls, 2002-2003

“For girls of every denomination, this program promises to become the classic. I wish that I, and then my daughters, had had this program while growing up.”
— Blu Greenberg, founding president, Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance

“Because of this program, these confident, bright young women will always know and appreciate true women’s friendship as well as the wisdom and depth of their Jewish roots.”
— Ronit Sherwin, supervisor and group leader, JCC of St. Louis

Gathering Momentum

Girls and the Jewish community are embracing the program. Due to the overwhelming response, Kolot doubled the number of groups we expected in our launch year – in 2002-2003, Kolot and our local partners (synagogues, JCCs, and other agencies) ran 40 groups from coast to coast.

And we continue to grow – girls are meeting in nearly 80 groups in 2003-2004. Half the groups are returning for a second, third, or fourth year.

“Our evaluation data over the past two years indicate that Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing! has a very positive effect on the teenage girls who participate,” said Dr. Christina Ager of the B’EST Program, the project’s independent evaluator.

“The girls maintain a high level of self-concept, or self-esteem, throughout the program; they say they believe that there is an equal place for girls in Judaism; and they report that they enjoy the opportunity to talk about life and glean positive information about women’s roles and participation in Judaism,” said Ager in her report to Kolot.
A Sneak Peek into a Girls’ Rosh Hodesh Meeting

IYAR: Knowing What Counts
The Omer and Being True

EXPLORE: Counting the Omer
The leader and girls discuss the Jewish mystical tradition of counting the Omer – between the second night of Passover and Shavuot – as a time to focus on spiritual growth. As we count each day we prepare ourselves spiritually to receive the Torah on Shavuot by contemplating our spiritual character.

Each of the seven weeks of the Omer is associated with a different spiritual quality. Each quality is in turn associated with a different color.

CREATE: Omer Bracelets
The girls make Omer Bracelets out of different colored thread, choosing colors that represent the qualities that they would like to enhance in themselves. For example, if someone wants to develop her intuition and her confidence, she uses yellow and red.

BRING IT HOME
Girls are encouraged to wear their bracelets through the period of the Counting of the Omer to serve as reminders of their spiritual character goals – bringing out and being true to the best in themselves.

CLOSING
Each girl explains the significance of the colors she selected in the design of her bracelet.

In 2002-2003 Kolot:

- began developing clusters of groups concentrated in Baltimore, Dallas, Denver, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, and Seattle in order to organize regional trainings and annual gatherings for girls.

- helped our partners recruit creative group leaders committed to enriching the lives of girls. Leaders include teachers, social workers, nurses, and therapists.

- trained group leaders in our method in five sessions in New York, Philadelphia, and Denver, preparing leaders to organize and run groups, draw on Kolot’s materials and support, and help evaluate the program.

- conducted an independent evaluation which determined that we are meeting our goals and assessed which aspects of the program we can improve to guarantee its continued growth and success.

- secured coverage by Jewish newspapers, including The New York Jewish Week, The St. Louis Jewish Light, and The Baltimore Jewish Times.

- received national and local funding to underwrite our partners’ program fees.

- published the comprehensive manual, Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing! A Sourcebook for Leaders, written by Barbra Berley-Mellits, MSW and Rabbi Rachel Gartner, which includes 28 monthly meeting plans.

- continued our guidance throughout the year, regularly consulting with leaders by telephone and email.

- conducted an independent evaluation which determined that we are meeting our goals and assessed which aspects of the program we can improve to guarantee its continued growth and success.

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Generous Support

The creation, implementation, and continuation of the project have been made possible by a series of major grants from The Hadassah Foundation. Establishing Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s A Girl Thing! in New York has been made possible by a grant from the UJA-Federation of New York’s Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal. Replication of Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s A Girl Thing! for girls across North America is supported by multi-year grants from the Covenant Foundation and the Righteous Persons Foundation, and by The Shefa Fund and several local foundations (see page 13).

To give girls in your community the gift of Rosh Hodesh, contact National Project Director Mindy Shapiro at mshapiro@rrc.edu or (215) 576-0800 x137. In New York, contact Bena Medjuck at bmedjuck@nyc.rr.com or (212) 665-3127.

These Philadelphia-area 10th and 11th graders have been meeting since the pilot stage, 2000-2001.
Dedicated to “Valuing Giving,” Kolot’s Spring Benefit honored Debby Hirshman, founding director of the JCC in Manhattan, and Marge Piercy, celebrated poet, on June 4, 2003, the eve of Shavuot.

Benefit Co-Chair Stephen Peck presented the 2003 Kol Isha award to Debby Hirshman for her leadership and commitment to building community.

Accepting the award, Debby said to the 340 benefit attendees, “As we go into this holiday, may we all remember that when Naomi turned to Ruth and said, ‘I have nothing to give you; turn back,’ Ruth knew that Naomi had personhood and values. So no matter who we are, we each have something to give, and that is our obligation.”

Debby’s vision, talent, and hard work were the driving force behind the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan from its founding in 1990 until 2003, when she served as its executive director. Today, Debby is a national role model of excellence in leadership.

Marge Piercy, celebrated poet, novelist, and an original Jewish liturgist, read her poems, “The Art of Blessing the Day,” “To Be of Use,” and “The Book of Ruth and Naomi” from her collection, The Art of Blessing the Day.

Marge is the author of 16 collections of poetry and 16 novels, most recently, Colors Passing Through Us, and a memoir, Sleeping with Cats.

Benefit participants decorated checkbook covers with art and messages concerning the values of giving, continuing Kolot’s tradition of creating ritual objects at our annual events.

“The beautiful designs are meant to remind us of our commitment to give of ourselves – in time and money – so that we may each contribute to tikkun olam, the repair of the world,” said Sally Gottesman, Kolot Advisory Board Chair.
Valuing Giving
From the 2003 Benefit Tribute Book

A Commentary on the Book of Ruth

In these passages, the words used to describe Ruth and Orpah’s relationship with Naomi is sometimes “daughters” banoti and at other times “daughters-in-law” kaloteyna. Perhaps these words reveal a shifting relationship.

How does asking someone for time or money influence your relationship with that person? How does giving time or money to someone influence your relationship with that person?

For I am too old. Naomi’s speech reflects the social belief that a woman who is old and no longer fertile has nothing to offer others. The story will prove her wrong.

Do you ever question the value of your contributions?

Voices on Giving

How much do we give?
How do we give?
How do we ask?
How do we receive?

“I hate asking for money; who doesn’t? Nevertheless, I grit my teeth, get on the phone, or shill from the lecture stage trying to build financial support for the causes I care most about. In the process I’ve discovered that fundraising is consciousness-raising, especially for women.”

— Letty Cottin Pogrebin

“Our children give a portion of each week’s allowance to tzedakah, collected in a special pushke. Just before Rosh Hashanah, we sit down with a variety of appeals and decide where to send donations bringing hope for a sweet New Year. We have been surprised and moved by some of our children’s choices over the years.”

— Rabbis Margot Stein and Myriam Klotz

“Is it possible to respond to the many requests of friends or colleagues who ask that I just come to this meeting, attend this dinner, see this person, write this letter? How frequently have I asked people to give of their time and felt my spirits lift, when they said, ‘yes, of course, my pleasure.’ Aligning our hearts and our heads with our values will always be a challenge, but it is invigorating to try to do it.”

— Shifra Bronznick

“Over time, I’ve tended steadily to give more money – not always, but sometimes. Jewish teaching says that giving is really a practice, that the more we do it, the more we learn how to do it, and I’ve found this to be true.”

— Nigel Savage

10 my daughters. 11 But Naomi said: “Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you?

12 “Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married.”

Checkbook covers will remind Lewis Polishook & Renee Bauer of the potential holiness of money.

Valuing Giving
From the 2003 Benefit Tribute Book

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Kolot gratefully acknowledges the commitment of the individual and institutional funders who supported our work during fiscal year September 2002-August 2003. Your gifts, from $10 to $250,000, have helped Kolot enrich Jewish experience through new understandings of gender and Judaism.

* In appreciation for their sustaining commitment to Kolot, we have placed an asterisk by the names of contributors who have supported Kolot this year and in years past.
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Henny Wenkart

Special thanks to those who helped establish this fund honoring Henny Wenkart by bringing feminist Jewish writers to enrich the community and help incorporate poetry and literature into liturgy.
Statements of Financial Position
(Unaudited) as of August 31, 2003

ASSETS
Cash and Equivalents - Operating and Restricted Funds $539,602
Pledges Receivable 360,027
Investments - Endowment Funds 1,399,877

Total Assets $2,299,506

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES
Liabilities $19,367
Fund Balances
Operating and Restricted Funds 557,735
Endowment Funds 1,722,404

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES $2,299,506

NOTES
1. The Pat Barr Restricted Fund was established in 2000 with $180,000 to support Kolot’s national programs.
2. Includes pledges to Kolot’s endowment funds.
3. Kolot is grateful to those who established the following endowment funds:
   ■ The Marie Barr Fund promotes student-led Kolot activities at RRC.
   ■ The Kolot Operating Endowment, established by Barbara Dobkin, Jan Goldman, Juliet Spitzer & Philip Wachs, and Margot Stein, supports Kolot programming.
   ■ The Sadie Gottesman and Arlene Gottesman Reff Kolot Chair in Gender and Judaism funds the Professorship and Academic Directorship of Kolot.
   ■ The Henny Wenkart Writer-in-Residence Fund brings feminist Jewish writers to enrich the community and help incorporate poetry and literature into liturgy.

SOURCES OF ANNUAL SUPPORT

- Foundation 27%
- Program Fees and Tambourine Sales 5%
- Investment Income 9%
- 42% Individual
- 17% Board
Kolot’s Financial Picture

The bar graph demonstrates Kolot’s program growth in 2002-2003 over the previous two fiscal years. The pie charts show the sources of Kolot’s operating income and how Kolot dedicated these funds.

**PROGRAM GROWTH**

The bar graph demonstrates Kolot’s program growth in 2002-2003 over the previous two fiscal years.

**OPERATING EXPENDITURES**

The pie charts show the sources of Kolot’s operating income and how Kolot dedicated these funds.

- **ritualwell.org** 17%
- **Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing!** 38%
- **Training Rabbinical Students** 15%
- **Publications & Public Education Programs** 15%
- **Administration** 6%
- **Institutional Support** 9%
Kolot’s Hanukah Blessing Card

An excerpt

Because Hebrew is a gendered language, God must be addressed and referred to using masculine or feminine pronouns.

Traditionally, all texts in Hebrew (the language of Jewish prayer) use masculine language.

We offer you an alternative to the traditional Hanukah blessings, replacing Meleḥ Ha’olam (King of the Universe) with Mekor Hahayim (Source of Life). We address God as you (feminine) and change the verbs accordingly.

We invite you to recite the Hanukah blessings on at least one night this year using the female pronouns for God.

Does your sense of the Divine shift?

Kolot.org

Kolot has a new home on the web: www.kolot.org features updated information on Kolot’s programs, including an extensive section aimed at encouraging Jewish leaders and institutions to adopt Kolot’s Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing! The site offers selected articles by Lori Lefkowitz, press clips on Kolot programs, Kolot’s blessing cards – including this Hanukah card, and information on purchasing tambourines.
Pat Barr z’l

We remember Patricia A. Barr, who died of breast cancer on June 19, 2003. Pat, the first recipient of Kolot’s Kol Isha (Women’s Voice) Award, passionately raised her voice to bring equality, loving kindness, and peace to the world. Pat served as Chair of the Board of Directors of Americans for Peace Now until her death, and as Vice Chair of RRC’s Board of Governors. Pat also founded and directed the National Breast Cancer Coalition. Pat endowed the Marie Barr Fund in honor of her mother to support Kolot’s work training rabbis and other Jewish leaders at RRC. May the memory of Pat’s efforts to repair the world be both a blessing and a charge.

For more information, please contact Kolot at kolot@rrc.edu or (215) 576-0800 x149.

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz, President and Donald Shapiro, Chair of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC), and to the College’s Board, administration, staff, faculty, and students for helping sustain Kolot’s vision and work.