

A Heralded Compromise That STILL Leaves Out Women

By [Tamra Dollin](#)

I'm one of those hard-to-categorize Jews, caught somewhere between the Conservative and Orthodox denominations. My practice leans Orthodox, my passion for women's spiritual leadership is decidedly feminist.

So it was with a catch in my throat that I read about the recent "historic compromise" in the Knesset creating a larger and more accessible egalitarian section of the Kotel (Western Wall) while maintaining haredi Orthodox authority over the larger gender-segregated section.

[READ: Why the Western Wall Compromise Matters — And Doesn't](#)

Supposedly both sides compromised. For the existing haredi authority, they agreed that non-Orthodox Jews (i.e., the majority of the Jewish world) are entitled to access and pray at this holy site as they are accustomed, without separation by gender. The non-Orthodox movements agreed to stop agitating by gathering monthly ([Women of the Wall](#)) and gain an enlarged public area and improved access to the Kotel. Everyone gives a little and everyone gets something.

[READ: Three Maps That Explain the Western Wall Compromise](#)

Except.

Except for Miriam, the Prophetess, who "Took her drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances." ([Exodus 15:20](#)) She would still not find a place to lead the women in singing and dancing.

Except for women who want to pray in a group with other women.

Except for women who live according to Orthodox tradition, which mandates daily prayer, and desire that prayer to be led by women, in the company of women.

Except for women who believe that Jewish law permits women's prayer groups.

Except for women whose gifts for public spiritual leadership and fidelity to traditional Jewish law still are not recognized.

Except for women who cherish the erasing of denominational divisions, and who are empowered to connect spiritually and pray to God publicly with other women.

Except for women who find power and solace and connection to God surrounded by other women, whose voices can be heard.

Except for women who love hearing the music of other women as they connect to God and one another through prayer.

In 2013, I led a group of women from my Conservative synagogue to Israel to explore the areas where gender and religion exist in tension. We were privileged to join Women of the Wall in morning prayer, and hear the Torah read publicly by women. Never have I had such a powerful prayer experience. Finally, the Wall was mine too! My voice was heard. My supplications, my gratitude, my hopes and dreams. My voice, joined with so many others, created a power that

words cannot describe. I have visited the Wall many times but for the first time, the anger against the injustice of being quieted slipped away. My voice was allowed to reach to the heavens, to talk to God, to create harmony, to give strength and inspiration to others around me, and to gain strength from them.

I have participated in and led other women's prayer experiences, and they are unique and powerful to those who participate. What men have experienced in *minyanim* (prayer services) over the centuries was finally available to me: the strength of hearing voices rise in song together, the bonds of connection forged in prayer, song and dance, the sense of shared experience, shared history and shared destiny. I am filled with pride for those women who are now bringing advanced learning and their voices to our sacred texts, continuing the evolution of *halakha* (Jewish law) so that Judaism continues to speak to the next generation.

This week in Israel, at the Knesset, an historic compromise was indeed reached. And that should be celebrated. Yet the work of fully accepting the spiritual leadership of women across the denominational spectrum, including Orthodoxy, continues. The desire of women who live their lives according to *halakha* and desire to pray communally in the fellowship of other women, and be led by them, remains unrequited and unrecognized at the Kotel.

I still await the day when I can join or lead a group of women in public prayer at the Kotel, without regard to our differences, rejoicing in our shared expression of devotion to God and tradition, feeling uplifted as harmonies fuse with melody to sing a new song. Who knows? We might even inspire the men in their own prayers!

