

TOWARDS A HALAKHA* OF UNHEARD VOICES.

Could The Halakha Provide A Beacon For The Contemporary World in Our Dealings With The Oppressed And The Voiceless?

In this lecture, Dr. Hadari brings together threads from a number of my previous pieces of research – and launch her newest project: exploring whether there might be, and if so, what might be, a Halakha (Jewish Ethic) of Unheard Voices.

Central to her argument is the conviction that human beings experience a strong need to understand and make sense of their own lives, and that we do so primarily through the construction of narratives. We all have stories we tell about ourselves, about the things we have done and about the things we have experienced. Some of those stories are so crucial to our sense of self that to have them discounted, distorted or derided by those who wield power over us can be experienced as a form of oppression – regardless of whether or not their refusal to “hear” us leads to, or is accompanied by, any more tangible form of oppression.

Because the primary focus of Dr. Hadari’s research is on the interaction between Jewish Theology and Ethics and contemporary (secular) intellectual, legal and political culture, she asks, on the one hand, how ancient Jewish texts might provide us with a range of models for responsible decision-making in such a context. On the other hand, she explores the extent to which in its contemporary incarnation, Jewish Law (in its Modern embrace of the positive demands of rationality, transparency and universality of application) has lost some of its willingness or ability to hear voices which appear irrational or unduly challenging. She asks, then, whether, post-modern developments in secular moral philosophy – particularly those associated with feminism – might provide a counter-balancing interlocutor for Halakhic texts.

Dr. Hadari will move from the Talmud, through the Codes of Jewish Law to modern day Responsa literature, exploring challenges as seemingly disparate as anorexia, data protection and the crisis in foster care provision, asking whether it might be possible to construct a truly feminist Halakha – and whether that Halakha could provide a beacon for the contemporary world in our dealings with the oppressed and the voiceless.

Dr. Nechama Hadari

is a member of the European committee of the Jewish Law Association as well as a member of SIIBS. She gained her PhD as a member of the Agunah Research Unit at the University of Manchester, where her thesis, *The Kosher Get: A Halakhic Story of Divorce* (Deborah Charles, 2012) explored Rabbinic understandings of autonomy and the human will, reaching far beyond the initial context of the research (the Mishnaic requirement that a man should only divorce his wife “willingly”). The thesis was subsequently awarded a prize by the International Council of Jewish Women. Her subsequent work has explored the intersection of gender, autonomy and religion in contexts as diverse as: attributing responsibility for war crimes, the coercive treatment of anorexia nervosa sufferers and societal attitudes towards teen pregnancy. Currently she’s involved in a feminist theological examination of the moral “fallout” from narratives we construct and accept about the Holocaust. In the context of the Shiloh project, she asks how the growing literature focussing on women’s complicity with, retrospective support for and (on occasion) active participation in the Holocaust might be interpreted in part as an uneasy response to growing awareness of the widespread rape of German women in the immediate aftermath of the War.



Tuesday 26th of February 2019, 5:15 to 7:00 pm
Room 8/9, FAMES, Cambridge, CB3 9DA

*The Halakha is the collective body of Jewish religious laws derived from the written and Oral Torah