

‘I DIDNT KNOW I WANTED TO BE A RABBI, THERE WAS NO NAME FOR  
WHAT I WANTED TO BE’: LIFE STORIES OF WOMEN RABBIS  
LIVING IN ISRAEL

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The ordination of women as rabbis is a relatively new phenomenon in Jewish communities worldwide, and especially in the State of Israel. Israel's non-Orthodox movements did not begin to ordain women until twenty years after the first woman rabbi was ordained in the United States. Today, Israeli women rabbis continue to confront deeply rooted cultural prejudices and stereotypes while seeking to reshape the place of women in Judaism. In this article, I analyze and interpret Israeli women rabbis' shared experiences as extracted from their life stories. Analyzing these stories using the narrative-package model revealed their commonalities with Vladimir Propp's fairy tale narrative structure. The content of these narratives by pioneer Israeli women rabbis emphasizes the deconstruction of gender roles in Judaism and in Israeli society, even while new structures are established, enabling women to assume religious leadership. The narrators are aware of the numerous challenges they face, but most of them are deeply motivated to continue exerting influence on Israeli society. Their life stories are exceptional and constitute a female phenomenon that maintains a vivid dialog simultaneously with Jewish culture and tradition over the generations and with different streams of Judaism as well as an inter-gender and cross-gender dialogue. The Israeli cultural context, with its characteristic polyphony, constitutes a unique background for the formation of a new tradition that seeks to become institutionalized. This process outlines social boundaries in public and private spaces.