"WOMEN'S WISDOM HAS BUILT ITS HOME" — A HIGHLY PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE PELECH EXPERIMENT

Alice Shalvi

Genesis

Considering the controversy that has surrounded the Pelech[1] School for Girls throughout so much of its history, it comes as no surprise that there is a measure of disagreement even regarding the date of its founding. There are those who claim the school was established in 1965, when Rabbi Shalom Rosenbluth and his wife Pnina — both veteran educators — first rented a flat in Jerusalem's Bayit Ve-gan district and began teaching a small group of fourteen year olds, including their younger daughter. Others maintain that the more correct date is September 1967 when, following the territorial realignments that resulted from the Six Day War, "Reb Sholom" persuaded the Ministry for Religious Affairs to rent him an abandoned building on the slopes of Mt. Zion, in what had previously been no-man's-land. It was there that Pelech, an ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) high school for girls, launched its highly unorthodox activities, seeking to attract girls from the Beit Ya'akov network and to provide them with a far wider-ranging program of secular studies and more in-depth Jewish studies than those available at Beit Ya'akov.

Gemara (Talmud) was from the first a compulsory subject at Pelech, though explicitly prohibited to girls by the ultra-Orthodox community and even in state religious schools customarily taught only to boys. Natural curiosity, far from being stifled for fear it should lead to religious scepticism, was actively encouraged, even when it led to study of topics normally forbidden in ultra-Orthodox circles.

[1] "Pelech" is the Hebrew word for spindle. The name was originally taken from the Talmudic saying: "Woman's wisdom is only in the spindle." The school interpreted this to mean that if a young woman sought wisdom, she would find it by studying at Pelech.

Little wonder, therefore, that within five years of opening Pelech was being boycotted by the very community which it had set out to enlighten while simultaneously attracting in ever-growing numbers the daughters of well-educated "modern Orthodox" families, many of which were headed by well-known academicians, members of the free professions, and community leaders.[2]

Because the school was very small, with a total of only some fifty pupils in all four of its grades, it neither required nor could afford to employ full-time teachers. Reb Sholom himself taught Talmud, mathematics and physics, while Pnina taught English. Virtually all the other teachers were men whose main place of employment was elsewhere and who taught at Pelech either in order to eke out their income or as a personal favor to the Rosenbluths. Many of them were paid in kind rather than in cash ("You need a new suit. I know a good tailor who'll make one for you"); many of them had no formal training as teachers and no certification. Women teachers of child-bearing age were anathema to Reb Sholom, who suspected them of deliberately giving birth at times least convenient to the school calendar.

The Yom Kippur War, which broke out in October 1973 and dragged on for almost a year, brought about the first of a series of major crises which critically affected Pelech. Most of the male teachers were conscripted, one of them was gravely wounded, and Reb Sholom took over almost all the teaching duties. Since even he could not be in all classes simultaneously, many of the pupils found themselves with numerous "free periods," which they were tempted to spend wandering unsupervised around the Old City of Jerusalem, beneath the walls of which the school was located.

The school was as yet not accredited by the Ministry of Education, parents had to pay fees which many of them could barely afford, and the Rosenbluths (who did not excel at administration) were personally funding the school as they had personally funded the renovation of the picturesque but ramshackle building. Though a few influential parents were enlisted to approach both the Ministry of

2 A fit illustration of the cause of both phenomena is to be found in my own experience: what won me over to transferring my oldest daughter to Pelech was that, during my first visit, one of the twelfth graders, whom I happened also to know personally as highly observant, was pointed out to me as currently writing a paper on "Christian Symbols in the Novels of Graham Greene."

Education and the municipal education authority, they encountered deep opposition the the school and a (perhaps understandable) reluctance to provide funding to what must have appeared an improvisational undertaking wholly lacking the characteristics usually to be found in more Orthodox institutions.

The terrorist attack on the Ma'alot school in 1974 shocked the parent body of Pelech into an awareness of the extent to which its remote location made it particularly vulnerable to hostile activities. In addition to devoting time and effort to pacifying the authorities and cajoling them into officially recognizing the school, the parents' committee now found itself also looking for new quarters. The Rosenbluths, for their part, decided that they no longer wished to invest money and effort in what was increasingly remote from their initial declared aim. In the spring of 1975, with the number of applicants from the ultra-Orthodox community dwindling annually and only a dozen or so from the state religious system replacing them, the founders announced their intention of closing the school.

However, by this time those of us who had grown to appreciate the school's philosophy and its profound difference, in principle and practice, from other religious secondary schools for girls, were determined to ensure its continues existence. In the absence of other candidate for the post of principal, I volunteered my services as assistant to the Rosenbluths, intendinhg primarily to put some order into the school admisitration and dinaces, so as to facilitate accreditation and to free *them* to continue handling the school's educational aspects. To my surprise, I one day found myself being introduced to the visiting inspector as the school's principal and as the person to whom all matters relating to Pelech should henceforth be addressed. This did I have greatness thrust upon me!

Exodus

The 1975 school year began in "new" quarters which, while phsically totally unsuited to house a school, nevertheless matched the improvisation character of Pelech's activities. We rented the ground florr and part of the second storey of a two-storey house in Bayit Vegan, where the landlady continued to reside in two rooms of the upper storey, filling the building with pungent odors of her highly

spiced daily fare and occasionally venturing forth to demand greater quiet and decorum. One small room doubled as "library" and staff room — a duplication made all the easier by both the paucity of the library's holdings (a Babylonian Talmud, a set of Nehama Leibowitz Bible commentaries, and a few copies of the Bible) and the minimal staffing, whose teaching schedules (as dictated by the demands of their main places of employment) in any case never allowed for free hours. Another, even smaller, room served both myself, the part-time secretary I had employed, and my assistant principal, a new immigrant from the U.S. who could teach both Talmud and mathematics, just as Reb Sholom had done. In addition, we had five rooms for the four homeroom classes and for any electives that were being taught at any one time. The pleasant but weed-covered back garden and a spacious front balcony provided additional space in fine weather. Assemblies were held in the garden and I still have in my possession an idyllic photograph of a pretty, blonde twelfth grader perched on the lower branches of a gnarled olive tree, her head bent over a large volume of Talmud.

Physically, the school was worse off than ever before. But educationally I had the great good fortune to take up my new post at the most auspicious of times. David Pur, the founding headmaster of the innovative school at Kibbutz Givat Brenner and a great believer in, and advocate of, open, pupil-centered education, had just been put in charge of secondary education at the Ministry of Education. As a result, a major reform of secondary education had been launched, abolishing the traditional "sets" of specialization which enforced pupils' choice between a humanities and a science trend, enabling a freer selection and combination of subjects, and granting greater autonomy to schools that wished to implement innovative courses and/or methods.

As a parent who had spent many years bewailing the inadequacies of the various schools attended by my six children, I flung myself (perhaps overzealously) into the task of reorganizing the curriculum, initiating new courses, hiring new teachers willing to join me in my (frequently outrageous) experiments — young people (mainly women) who were prepared to engage in what I hoped would be an ultimately fruitful series of trials and possible errors and who made up in openness and enthusiasm for what they lacked in classroom experience.

Amazingly — and wonderfully — it worked! Within three years Pelech had been accredited as one of the (then) only two officially recognized "experimental" high schools. We were in the good graces of the Ministry of Education and even beginning to be grudgingly appreciated by the head of the Jerusalem Municipal Education Department, who nevertheless continued (without any foundation in fact) to maintain that we were an "exclusive," all Ashkenazi, discriminatory institution. School fees had been abolished, but I was forced to seek donors prepared to help cover the costs of continuing a curriculum that combined a maximum range of electives with classes numbering no more than twenty-five to twenty-seven pupils. Although most parents donated a sizeable sum to provide a supplement to the Ministry's per capita allocation, the number of those financially unable to contribute grew as we developed enrichment programs that drew pupils from the socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

In 1976 the school had to find a new home yet again, since the municipality — in a move that was incomprehensible save in terms of harassment — inexplicably decided that it required our totally inappropriate premises for a new secular primary school that the authorities wished to establish in what was a predominantly Orthodox neighborhood.

By way of grudging compensation, however, we were allocated an abandoned three-storey house in a quiet street in the (at that time still rather dilapidated but later rapidly gentrified) Bak'a neighborhood. In return for repairing and renovating it, installing sorely needed central heating, and planting a garden to replace the forbidding grey asphalt surroundings, we were exempted from paying rent over a lengthy period. An outhouse was converted into an all-purpose science laboratory and we were able to maintain, not without some pride, that ours was the only staff-room in Israel that had previously been a toilet! It was here that what may be called the "revised version" of the Pelech experiment really flourished and reached the heights of innovation and excellence for which it rapidly became renowned.

Wandering in the Wilderness

In addition to the dissatisfaction I had long felt with the traditional,

narrow, stultified and stultifying content and methods of (particularly religious) education in Israel, a number of individuals and ideas inspired my work at Pelech.

Lacking any formal training in education, I had nevertheless, as a parent, practiced a combination of minimal rule making with maximal encouragement of individualism. This, I firmly believe, should also be the basic guideline of more formal education. More concretely, I was inspired by anecdotal evidence provided by both David Pur (from whom I learned of his work at Givat Brenner) and my friends Daniel and Hannah Greenberg, who in 1965 founded the Sudbury Valley School near Boston and who described to me with great enthusiasm the totally child-centered and pupil-governed establishment that they were operating.

A cursory acquaintance with Kohlberg's theories on moral development further bolstered my belief in the potential contribution of schooling to value clarification. In addition, as a feminist, I maintained that no area of knowledge or experience should be inaccessible to girls and women solely on grounds of sex.

I had a number of educational goals in mind when I took over the principalship of Pelech. Defining the overall goal of education to be the equipping of young people to function as informed, committed and active members of the society which they join as adults upon leaving school, I sought to make the curriculum more immediately and recognizably relevant to the social context and to social needs. "Only connect," E.M. Forster's epigraph for *A Passage to India*, was my educational guiding light. I sought to show pupils (and teachers) how ideas, ideologies, areas of knowledge, even people, interact, intertwine, interlock — how the disparate trees of cognition combine to constitute a forest of knowledge and understanding.

To inculcate an understanding of the democratic process and of the duties and rights of the individual within a democratic system, I argued that school must approximate as closely as possible to a democratic institution and that pupils as well as staff must therefore be maximally involved in decision making. To overcome the often fragmented nature of the official syllabus, I encouraged teachers to develop interdisciplinary courses that (given the dearth of teachers qualified to teach more than one subject) necessitated group teaching. To enable individual pupils with vastly differing interests and abilities to develop their potential to the utmost, both cognitively and in affect,

.we maximalized individual study, release time, project writing, library work, and creative studies such as art, music and drama.

Pastoral care, which in Israel is primarily the responsibility of a homeroom teacher in charge of thirty or even forty pupils, was assigned to a fairly large number of tutors, from among whom each pupil could choose the one most congenial to her. Tutors had up to sixteen pupils in their care and were responsible for meeting each one for at least a quarter of an hour each month. The tutor, rather than the homeroom teacher or the principal, constituted the main line of communication with the home, as well as serving as intermediary between pupils and other teachers if and when problems or tensions arose.

Looking back now on what we accomplished between 1976 and 1990, the year in which I retired from Pelech, I can discern a number of remarkable achievements. In the area of curriculum development I would pinpoint the following:

- Our pioneering work in Environmental Studies. (We launched a course on Ecology in 1975 when the concept was virtually unheard of in Israel and nowhere studied).
- The development of a four year Total History course, which combined the study of those sociopolitical and economic events and trends that constitute the subject matter of traditional history courses with a concurrent study of the literature, philosophy, art and music of the period in question, each year of study being devoted to a different "age," ranging from the classical period to modernity.[3]
- A four year course entitled "Israeli Society," which replaced the arid and irrelevant civics course mandated by the Ministry of Education with study of Israel's ethnic composition; the social problems resulting from the mass immigration of the 1950s, and the institutions (both government and voluntary) developed in order to deal with those problems; Israel's mode of government, the way it derives (or deviates) from Jewish tradition and the way it compares with or differs from other modes of government in the past and the present. In the framework of this course,

3 Unlike other schools, we never separated the study of Jewish history from that of "general history."

tenth grade pupils were required to choose an agency with which they would work in serving the needs of any distressed community or individual — work in which they were supervised not only by a Pelech staff member but also by a trained professional in the employ of the respective agency.

- We instituted a program of Family Studies that went far beyond "sex education" to include units on nutrition, physical space-planning in the house, factors determining choice of a life-partner, family planning, child psychology, and the parental role in child development. At each stage, the halakhic aspects (e.g., dietary laws, family purity [*taharat ha-mishpaha*] and rulings on contraception) were integrated into the course, so that their relevançe to the everyday life of an observant Jew was immediately discernible.

We sought to clarify the development and continuity of Jewish thought and practice, as well as the evolution of halakha, by teaching and studying a number of topics as they appeared and were developed over long periods of time — in the Bible, the Talmud, medieval philosophy, and the work of contemporary Jewish thinkers such as Soloveitchik and Leibowitz.

In 1988, following the outbreak of the intifada, my assistant principal, Aryeh Geiger, together with philosophy teacher Shulamith Levy, herself a Pelech alumna, developed an outstanding course on conflict and conflict resolution, which was integrated into the Israeli Society course in eleventh grade. It deals with conflicts inherent in Israeli society — between various ethnic groups, between the religiously observant and the militantly secular, between "doves" and "hawks," between "haves" and "have nots," between men and women. Analyzing the source of the various conflicts, the course seeks also to inculcate awareness of, and skills in, ways of resolving such conflicts, on both the personal and communal level. Deriving initially from awareness of a specific and immediate critical social problem, the course typically builds on both traditional Jewish moral principles and modern methods of social dynamics and psychotherapy, seeking to inculcate not only profound moral values but also awareness of contemporary social problems and much-needed practical skills that might enable the individual pupil to deal with

these problems. In aim, content, and method, it is a micro-model of everything Pelech strives for.

We devised new modes of evaluation — "take-home" examinations, "library examinations" that tested the pupils' ability to search for information in a variety of primary and secondary sources, the writing of individual term papers and mini-theses. Pupils with creative talents were encouraged (most notably in a remarkable course on the Holocaust) to respond to the subject matter through the plastic arts, drama, even dancing. Because pupils in that course wanted to learn the partisans' songs in the original, we became the first high school in Israel to teach Yiddish.

Since a good grounding in science is now so essential a part of general education, we actively encouraged pupils to choose chemistry and physics, as well as biology, as "majors." As a result, Pelech achieved a national record in the number of girl pupils studying these subjects as part of their *bagrut* (matriculation) requirements. At one point, over half of all eleventh grade pupils were taking physics at the highest (5 point) level — a proportion unequalled by even the most prestigious coeducational schools in the country.

And because there was a certain truth in the authorities' contention that our pupils were too exclusively middle class and Ashkenazi, we began an enrichment program designed for academically promising seventh and eighth grade pupils from neighborhoods officially designated as socioeconomically disadvantaged. About fifty in number, they came to Pelech twice a week, each time for supplementary coaching in mathematics, English, Jewish studies, and Hebrew composition, but with the typically Pelech additions of art and music as well as outings to museums and theaters. The scheme has proved successful and each year a number of "graduates" of the program join Pelech's ninth grade, while the remainder are, almost without exception, accepted by the high schools of their choice, however "prestigious" or selective they may be.

Our major criterion for accepting pupils, once the number of applicants swelled to such an extent that selection was imperative, was natural curiosity, rather than past scholastic attainments. The determining item in our entrance examination came to be a group interview, at which four to five applicants met with myself, our counsellor, and another senior staff member for about forty-five minutes. During this time, each pupil was asked to introduce herself (for this

purpose applicants were encouraged to bring objects that might assist them; one of them responded by bringing her pet Alsatian!) and then, using a topic, a text or a picture, we began a free discussion through which we were able to evaluate not only personal traits but also human interaction. We accepted many pupils who were considered academically mediocre, but who flourished under Pelech's encouraging tutelage.

Most remarkable, to my mind, was the gradual development of our mode of pupil-participatory school government acceptable to the staff. Much against the inclination of most of the teachers, and despite the initial scepticism of the pupils themselves, I insisted, even in my first year as principal, in holding monthly "general meetings." These evolved into a school parliament, whose agenda was determined by ongoing and ad hoc issues under discussion or dispute, and at whose assemblies the principle of "one person one vote" was in indisputable operation. This body early on abolished the draconian (and with time wholly inappropriate) dress code established by the Rosenbluths in their (ultimately vain) attempt to attract the ultra-Orthodox community, which consisted of long stockings and long sleeves throughout the entire year, a black and white pepita skirt descending well below the knees and a black-buttoned white blouse. This "parliament" proceeded to discuss and lay down rules relating to compulsory attendance at daily prayers, sensibly acknowledging that while one may compel people to attend one cannot compel them to pray! And most memorably it engaged in a lengthy and fascinating debate, which stretched over several weeks, on the pupils' right to demand sanctions against teachers comparable to those that are considered to be a teacher's inalienable right to impose upon pupils. What most impressed me on that occasion (and what I have consistently cited as the outstanding example of the responsibility with which young people will exercise authority when they are educated — and encouraged — in its correct use) was that the pupils sensed my own painful dilemma, caught as I was between my firm belief in their rights and the violent opposition openly demonstrated by a large number of the staff. In the end, the pupils — unprecedentedly and uniquely — voted not to vote, but rather to maintain the status quo, thus limiting their own rights.

The contant flux that came to typify the school was a source of achievement and pride but it also entailed enormous strain on the staff. One of my senior teachers, who joined the school when I did, plaintively inquired a few years later whether it was a matter of principle on my part to overhaul the curriculum every year. On reflection, I decided that, so long as perfection remained ipso facto humanly unattainable, ongoing reevaluation and change were indeed necessary. My husband compiled a brief text, putting together some sentences from Parkinson's work *Parkinson's Law: The Pursuit of Progress,* which ran as follows:

It is now known
that a perfection of planned layout
is achieved only by institutions
on the point of collapse....
*
PERFECTION OF PLANNING
IS A SYMPTOM OF DECAY
*
During a period of exciting discovery or progress
there is no time to plan the perfect headquarters.
The time for that comes later,
when all important work has been done.
Perfection is finality;
and finality
is death...

For years it hung in my room and I even had it printed in postcard form to hand out to visitors by way of explanation for the improvisatory atmosphere, which even long after the Rosenbluths' departure, continued to characterize the school.

Expulsion from Eden

My fifteen years at Pelech were challenging, exciting, exhausting, and rewarding. But it was far from "roses, roses all the way." On the contrary, "establishments" of various kinds, many of my fellow prin-

cipals in the state religious system, some of my more religiously Orthodox staff members (particularly the yeshiva-trained ones), even some of the parents who had freely chosen to send their daughters to Pelech, and, finally, the head of the Religious Education Department at the Ministry of Education, opposed my philosophy and, outraged by my personal political and social opinions and activities, ultimately led me to conclude that my continued presence at Pelech was harming the school more than it was benefitting it.

The earliest examples of opposition proved comparatively easy to overcome, though they caused serious crises and led to a number of regrettable resignations. The first arose from my employment of a woman to teach Talmud. The contention resulted not so much from her sex (though this in itself was a cause for much lifting of eyebrows and querying of credentials) as from the fact that she had received her training at what was at that time (1977) the only institution at which a woman could study Talmud at the highest possible level — the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. A graduate of the Conservative Movement's major academic establishment at a "*haredi*" school (as Pelech still nominally was)? Impossible! Threatened with the resignation of three male teachers, I nevertheless backed my choice, insisting that there were no grounds for querying her personal religious orthodoxy. I won out — but the men left at the end of the year, though not before one of them (who had been appointed as a kind of halakhic overseer to guard against similar unorthodoxies in the future) had sent out letters to all the parents of girls registered for the approaching school year, warning them that the school was not truly "*kasher*" — an act that resulted in the non-registration of about one-third of those accepted.

My next "indiscretion" was to request the military authorities to send a woman officer to explain the nature of women's service in the IDF[4] and its compatibility with religious practice. This was directly opposed both to the school's initial policy of forbidding military service for women (which had resulted in the fact that of my oldest daughter's graduating class [1975] only she and one other young woman had joined the IDF, in the framework of a special Teachers' Unit established for the religiously observant) and to official rulings on the part of the religious branch of the Ministry of Education which

4 Israel Defense Forces.

on this issue, as in others, abided by the edicts of the Chief Rabbinate.

Again I was faced with the threat of resignation, again I refused to buckle under. None other than the commanding officer of the Women's Corps chose to come to speak to our eleventh grade and the content and manner of her address were so eminently reasonable, so considerate of the beliefs and practices of our pupils and their families, that not only were our opponents disarmed, but a major change occurred in the behavior of our graduates, of whom over eighty percent now choose service in the IDF, while the remainder serve for a full two years in the voluntary National Service framework. The norm established by the Rosenbluths — either marriage at eighteen or continued studies immediately after leaving school — was irrevocably altered and replaced by the firm principle that it is the duty of every citizen to devote two years to service to the country and the community.

Less dramatic, but perhaps even more difficult to deal with, was the burnout of teachers constantly expected to be innovators themselves or to respond to my own (frequently excessive and perhaps inconsiderate) demands for change. Though a few of the staff flourished in conditions that encouraged them to propose and implement reform and experimentation, many of them (particularly the few older and more experienced ones, who had previously worked — or were still also working — in more conventional schools) felt intimidated by the educational demands, their self-esteem often undermined by the energy of younger colleagues and by the egalitarianism between pupils and staff which eliminated the superior status of authority that teachers traditionally automatically enjoy in their relationship with those in their charge.

Pelech is remarkable for the informal, easygoing, and friendly relationship that exists between pupils and teachers — a relationship of mutual trust and fellowship in learning. In addition, prior to the writing of report cards, we conducted twice-yearly sessions of mutual evaluation at which pupils and staff could exchange comments and criticisms on each other's performance and achievement. While most teachers found this constructive, some were appalled and felt threatened by the pupil power inherent in this process.

Although the reforms of 1975 potentially permitted a major shake-up of the entire educational system, the institutions of higher learning

persisted in demanding that candidates for tertiary studies be in possession of the standard *bagrut* school-leaving certificate. They refused to recognize some of the Pelech courses and examinations as equivalent to those of the state, even though the chairman of the Inter-University Entrance Examination Board, who visited Pelech at my initiative to learn in detail of our requirements and standards, privately admitted that our methods of evaluation, as well as our program of studies, were superior to those required by the Ministry of Education. The fear of "exceptions to the rule," the reluctance to encourage or recognize as valuable anything out of the ordinary — in short, a certain intellectual and professional laziness on the part of the universities — ultimately meant that in some subjects Pelech pupils had to be examined on material other than, and additional to, that which they had studied. Despite the joy of learning that characterized the school — with which most visitors were so impressed as to comment on — it became more than could reasonably be expected of teenagers to require them to spend almost twice as much time on studies as their peer group in other schools.

The norms of the Israeli educational system also contrasted with those of Pelech where examinations were concerned. From its inception, the school had employed an honor system. Cheating in exams was unacceptable on moral grounds; it was *geneivat da'at*, deceitfulness. We did not invigilate examinations but spent considerable time, particularly in the ninth grade, dealing with the subject of honesty and fairness. If one happened to walk into a room full of pupils writing an examination, one was impressed by the silence and concentration, the heads bent over desks, the pens flowing rapidly. We were sticklers for following the instructions, including abiding by the time allotted, even when it seemed to us totally unreasonable to expect anybody who really knew the material to write six essay-style answers in one and a half hours. So it was always painful to hear — as our pupils routinely did from their friends at other schools — of invigilators who had allotted as much as an hour of overtime or staff members who had entered the examination room in order to volunteer the correct answers to difficult questions. As often happens in Israel, the honest found themselves considered fools and, as a result, indeed felt foolish.

However, none of these problems — severe though they often were — were responsible for the crises of my final five years at

Pelech, between 1985 and 1990. Rather, it was my own increasing involvement first in the Israeli feminist movement and, after the outbreak of the intifada in 1987, in dialogue groups with Palestinian women, that incurred the displeasure of the authorities at the religious branch of the Ministry of Education. My activities on behalf of the reform of the rabbinical courts that have sole jurisdiction over personal status (marriage and divorce) involved open criticism of the rabbinical establishment, which officially serves as the spiritual authority of the state religious educational system. My earlier challenge on their ruling against women's service in the IDF had been overlooked (partly because the religious kibbutz movement also compels girls to do military service), but my attacks on the iniquities and abuses of the religious court system — launched as part of a *secular* movement's demand for reform — were less easily ignored, particularly since they attained far greater publicity.

On the political front, my participation in meetings with Palestinians ran against the grain within a system many of whose members were adherents of the Greater Israel philosophy that encouraged continued occupation of — and intensified Jewish settlement within — Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip.

In May 1988, when I returned from an Israeli-Palestinian conference in Brussels, which had erroneously been described on the radio as being a (then still illegal) meeting with members of the PLO, I was confronted by insurmountable antagonism on the part of numerous staff members, particularly those who resided in the occupied territories, two of whom submitted their instant resignation. Throughout the school year that followed I found myself under constant scrutiny and even attack on the part of the newly appointed head of the religious branch. Two of his daughters were Pelech alumnae and he now found himself in the embarrassing position of having a third daughter who insisted on applying to a school headed by someone whom he wished to oust! Although most of the members of the school's Board of Governors supported me, arguing that my political views and activities in no way detracted from or impaired my competence as school principal, the official in question presented me with an ultimatum which sharpened my personal dilemma — either I must desist from my feminist and political activities or the school would lose its accreditation by the religious branch of the Ministry.

It did not take me long to reach a decision. I had devoted fifteen

years to creating a model school with so remarkable a reputation that people came from all over Israel and even from abroad to see it and learn from our experience. Moreover, other schools had adopted one or more of our courses or methods. A number of our innovations (e.g., the Ecology course) were by now established practice. Compulsory "voluntary" communal work had been integrated into the curriculum of most Jerusalem schools. Meetings between Jews and Arabs — which we had been the first religious school to engage in when, in 1983, we participated in a series of municipally sponsored encounters between eleventh grade pupils at Pelech and the Omariyah Girls' School in East Jerusalem — had become common practice, organized and encouraged by the Education for Democracy Department of the Ministry of Education, although the meetings are now exclusively with Israeli Arabs and not with Palestinians. Increasing numbers of religious young women serve in the IDF. Institutions of higher Torah study for women have mushroomed in Jerusalem, some of them established by mothers of Pelech pupils past and present. The notion of a young religiously observant woman being well versed in Talmud was no longer as outrageous or unattainable as it had seemed when the Rosenbluths set out to make the combination normative. Furthermore, the school that I had inherited as penniless and close to bankruptcy now had a large body of supporters, donors who appreciated our contribution to Israel's educational system. The municipality had even allocated a plot of land on which we were able to renovate a beautiful old building, which at last provided adequate laboratory space for science studies and an exquisitely furnished Beit Midrash. And whereas in 1975 and 1976 we had had to hold parlor meetings in order to persuade parents to enroll their daughters at Pelech, the school had for over a decade been inundated with requests for entry, the number of applications approaching almost double the number we were physically able — or officially permitted — to accept. It was time for me to devote my attention to other issues, to attempt to help create a society and a culture in which women like our alumnae, well versed in Judaism and committed to democratic principles of pluralism and tolerance, could take their place as equals with men. In April 1990, I tendered my resignation from the post of principal, though retaining for a further four years the function of Chairperson of the Board

Which, contrary to common practice, the Rosenbluths had cunningly combines with that of school principal.

The View from Nebo

I visit the school from time to time. It is hard altogether to cut the umbilical cord. Each September I am invited to give the opening address on the first day of the school year. I can now, without fear of dire consequences, openly advocate feminist principles ------ indeed, the pupils would be disappointed were I to do otherwise, I can speak without fear of official rebule of the need for peaceful coexistence with our Arab neighnors, of the importance of being personally acquainted with the "other," even when that "other" is nominally one's enemy.

Pelech is still one of the best schools in Israel, probably the very best of those that cater for religious girls. It may no longer be as innovative as it was, but for those who find it too achievement oriented there are now at least two alternative schools available, both headed by former staff members who worked closely with me, identifying wholly with my (for Israel) unconventional aims and methods, and who left the school when I did. As Shakespeare's Coriolanus puts it, "There is a world elsewhere" ---- a world in which I live and work with as much satisfaction and happiness as I achieved while I was at Pelech. One could hardly wish for more.