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**Ruth Bader Ginsburg  
Associate Justice  
Supreme Court of the United States**

**Remarks at the Genesis Foundation Lifetime  
Achievement Award Ceremony  
Tel Aviv**

**July 4, 2018**

**I am pleased beyond the capacity of words to  
convey that Aharon Barak has presented this award to  
me. He is one of the world's most brilliant,  
humanitarian jurists. I am proud to count him and his  
wife, Elika, treasured colleagues and friends.**

**Huge thanks, too, to the Genesis Foundation for  
creating a lifetime achievement award conferred by**

former Genesis Prize winners, an award I am permitted to accept.

I appreciate so very much the kind words just said about me. Yet I know that, more than anything else, good fortune — "mazel" — accounts for my part in the effort to achieve equal citizenship stature for women, also for the office I now hold, including the praise it garners. An Isaac Bashevis Singer remembrance bears retelling.

Singer's grandfather was a renowned orthodox rabbi who, in a sermon, put this question to his

**congregation: Why is the Almighty so eager for praise?**

**Three times a day we pray to him, we say how great He**

**is, how wonderful. Why should the creator of all the**

**stars, all the planets, be so eager for praise? The sage**

**rabbi's answer: The Almighty knows from experience,**

**from divine experience, that when people stop praising**

**him, they begin to praise one another. This, Singer's**

**grandfather said, is what the Almighty does not like.**

**But small people that we are, Singer added, we enjoy**

**sometimes some praise, especially when it comes from**

the mouths of good people. Just so, I am enjoying this event and my revisit to Israel.

It is fitting, on this occasion, to speak of two Jewish women raised in the USA whose humanity and bravery inspired me in my growing up years.

First, Emma Lazarus, elder cousin to the great jurist Benjamin Nathan Cardozo. Emma Lazarus was a Zionist before that word came into vogue. Her love for humankind, and especially for her People, is evident in all her writings. She wrote constantly, from her first volume of poetry published in 1866 at age 17, until her

death from cancer far too soon, at age 38. Her poem, "The New Colossus," etched on the base of the Statue of Liberty, has welcomed legions of immigrants, including my father and grandparents, people seeking in the USA shelter from fear and longed-for freedom from intolerance.

My next inspirer, Hadassah founder Henrietta Szold. Born in 1860, eleven years after Emma Lazarus, Szold lived until 1945. My mother spoke of her glowingly, also of Henry Street Settlement House founder Lillian Wald (who lived from 1867 until 1940). Szold knew

how to say "No" better than any other person whose words I have read. Szold had seven sisters, but no brother. When her mother died, a man well known for his community-spirited endeavors, Haym Peretz, offered to say the Kaddish — the mourner's prayer that, ancient custom instructed, could be recited only by men. Szold responded to that caring offer in a letter dated September 16, 1916. You can read it in full in *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality* and in the Jewish Women's Archive curriculum, *Making Our Wilderness Bloom*. The key passages:

**It is impossible for me to find words in  
which to tell you how deeply I was touched by  
your offer to act as “Kaddish” for my dear  
mother. . . . What you have offered to do [is  
beautiful beyond thanks] – I shall never forget  
it.**

**You will wonder, then, that I cannot accept  
your offer. . . . I know well, and appreciate  
what you say about, the Jewish custom [that  
only male children recite the prayer, and if  
there are no male survivors, a male stranger**

may act as substitute]; and Jewish custom is very dear and sacred to me. [Y]et I cannot ask you to say Kaddish after my mother. The Kaddish means to me that the survivor publicly . . . manifests his . . . intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community which his parent had, [so that] the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link. You can do that for the generations of your family, I must do that for the generations of my family.

...

**My mother had eight daughters and no son; yet never did I hear a word of regret pass the lips of either my mother or my father that one of us was not a son. When my father died, my mother would not permit others to take her daughters' place in saying the Kaddish, [and so I am sure] I am acting in her spirit when I am moved to decline your offer. But beautiful your offer remains nevertheless, and, I repeat, I know full well that it is much more in**

**[harmony] with the generally accepted Jewish tradition than is my or my family's conception.**

**You understand me, don't you?**

**Szold's plea for celebration of our common heritage while tolerating – indeed, appreciating – the differences among us concerning religious practice, is captivating, don't you agree? I recall her words even to this day when a colleague's words betray a certain lack of understanding.**

**When I became active in the movement to open doors to women, enabling them to enter occupations**

once closed to them - - lawyering and judging,  
bartending, policing, and firefighting, for example - - I  
was heartened by the words of a girl of my generation.

She wrote:

One of the many questions that have often  
bothered me is why women have been, and still  
are, thought to be so inferior to men. It's easy  
to say it's unfair, but that's not enough for me;  
I'd really like to know the reason for this great  
injustice!

Men presumably dominated women from

**the very beginning because of their greater  
physical strength; it's men who earn a living,  
beget children, [and] do as they please. . . .**

**Until recently, women silently went along with  
this, which was stupid, since the longer it's  
kept up, the more deeply entrenched it  
becomes. Fortunately, education, work and  
progress have opened women's eyes. In many  
countries they've been granted equal rights;  
many people, mainly women, but also men, now  
realize how wrong it was to tolerate this state**

of affairs for so long. . . .

Yours,

Anne M. Frank

This insightful comment was one of the last entered in her diary. Anne Frank, Diary readers in this audience know, was born in the Netherlands in July 1929. She died in 1945, while imprisoned at Bergen-Belsen, three months short of her 16th birthday.

I was asked some years ago by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) to supply a statement on how my heritage as a Jew and my occupation as a judge fit together. I responded this way:

**I am a judge, born, raised, and proud of being a Jew. The demand for justice, for peace, and for enlightenment runs through the entirety of Jewish history and Jewish tradition. I hope, in all the years I have the good fortune to continue serving on the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States, I will have the strength and courage to remain steadfast in the service of that demand.**

**With thanks for your patient audience, and once again, deepest appreciation to Aharon Barak and to the**

**Genesis Foundation, may I say to all gathered here:**

**Shalom v'todah rabah.**