



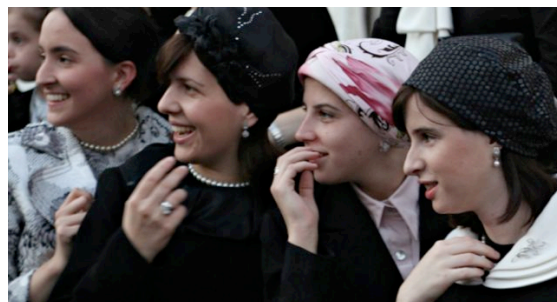
ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית  
World Zionist Organization  
המחלקה לפעילות בתפוצות  
Department for Diaspora Activities



## Haredi Women in Israel

### The Haredi Community in Israel

According to most estimates, the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community represents 10% of the total population in Israel. This community is characterized by its commitment to Torah study, its strict religious observance, and its rejection of the Israel as a purely secular state. The Haredi



community in Israel can be divided into several major groups that often differ significantly from one another in their specific ideologies and lifestyles, as well as the degree of stringency in religious practice, rigidity of religious philosophy and isolation from the general culture that they maintain. The Haredi educational system is independent from the mainstream Israeli educational system. While many of their schools are partially supported by the State, the State lacks any significant power to shape the schools' curricula. The Haredim's lack of mainstream education, and consequent low participation in the workforce, are regarded by many in Israel as a major social problem.

### Women in Haredi Society

A Haredi woman's primary responsibility, according to her community, is to marry and bear children. The average Haredi woman marries at age 20 and she will bear 7 children (this is three times more than her secular counterpart). Gender is a dividing element in many aspects of Haredi public life. In order to maintain a high level of modesty, the Haredi community has incorporated many elements of gender segregation into public life, including separate seating at community functions, separate shopping hours for men and women at community stores, and separate seating on buses.

However, in contrast to this view of a highly patriarchal society, Haredi women also play an important role in the economic structure of their society. In many cases, women serve as the



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית  
World Zionist Organization  
המחלקה לפעילות בתפוצות  
Department for Diaspora Activities



sole providers for their families while their husbands pursue full-time, religious studies. Haredi women are raised to expect a life of poverty (55% of families live below the poverty line) and to support their husband's holy pursuits. However over the past two decades, in an effort to obtain better work in the job market, the Haredi community has established all-female institutions that provide vocational training and academic degrees. Haredi women now enjoy a 66% employment rate (though this is 14% lower than the rate enjoyed by non-Orthodox Jewish women in Israel).

### Questions for Discussion

- Were you familiar with this population? If so, what pre-conceived notions did you have about this community, and specifically about the women in this community?
- Are there aspects of this community that you can appreciate and/or identify with?
- Can you summarize the tensions between this community's traditional values and practices and the values and practices of contemporary Israeli society?
- What issues in contemporary Israeli society do you think are of special importance to this community, and especially to its women? Choose one of the social issues examined earlier in the program and consider the issue from the perspective of a Haredi woman.