



CHICKEN SOUP:
WOMEN AND THE MAKING OF
THE MODERN JEWISH HOME AND NATION

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Sadye Goldseker serving chicken soup, 1954.

Gift of Audrey Polt, JMM.CP14.2010.35

THE EXHIBIT *BEYOND CHICKEN SOUP: JEWS AND MEDICINE IN AMERICA* TELLS A STORY OF THE INTERSECTION OF MEDICINE AND JEWISH CULTURE. ITS TITLE IMPLIES THAT “CHICKEN SOUP” IS NOT QUITE WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT JEWS AND MEDICINE. INSTEAD, CHICKEN SOUP IS WHAT THE (ASHKENAZI) JEWISH MOTHER OR GRANDMOTHER COOKS UP WHEN YOU GET HOME FROM THE DOCTOR’S OFFICE, TO COMFORT AND NURSE BACK TO HEALTH, BUT BEARS LITTLE RELATION TO MEDICAL PRACTICE. AS I WILL ARGUE, HOWEVER, CHICKEN SOUP, OR RATHER, WHAT IT SYMBOLIZES – JEWISH WOMEN’S CARE – IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE JEWISH CONTRIBUTION TO MEDICINE, AND OF MEDICINE TO JEWISH CULTURE. BY MOVING “BEYOND” IT, WE RISK THROWING OUT THE (JEWISH) BABY WITH THE BATHWATER, AND WITH IT, THE STORIES OF WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO BOTH.



Hadassah's American Zionist Medical Unit (AZMU) nurses and central committee members on the eve of their departure for Palestine, 1918.

Collection of Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc., courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society. CP35.2016.1

Simply integrating women into the narrative as scientists or doctors does not rectify the conceptual binary of women's care versus medicine. It is not enough to say that women came to take part in fields dominated by men. Instead, we must examine the categories themselves – Jews, medicine, and America – and their imperfect abstractions: religion, science, and nation. To do so, we must move beyond common notions and assumptions of what is scientific versus what is religious to examine two fundamental questions: 1) which values, beliefs, and practices make something religious or scientific? and 2) why do people choose to label things either scientific or religious? While it is common sense that nationalism is political, this essay will show that the categories of science and religion are no less so.

A study of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, provides an ideal lens through which to examine the politics of science, religion, and nationalism and their role in Jewish history. Founded in 1912, Hadassah's mission was to provide medical care for mothers and babies in Palestine, a focus its leaders chose because of its universal appeal to a broad range of Jewish women, both Zionist and non-Zionist. The strategy was wildly successful: Hadassah developed into the preeminent and largest Jewish women's organization. While in 1912 Hadassah reported a membership of 170 women, fifteen years later the roster had grown to 41,000 members of its junior and senior divisions nationwide.¹

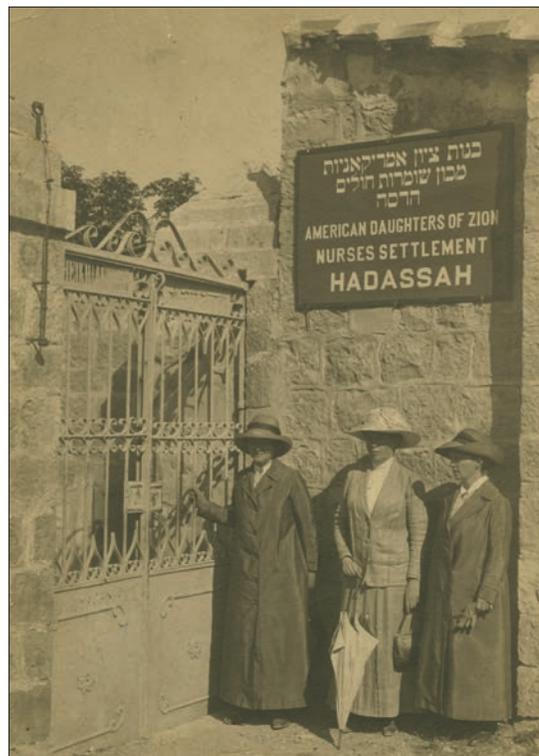
As the women of Hadassah worked to achieve their healthcare objectives, they also changed the face of American Jewry. While organizing women of all ages around the cause of health in Palestine, Hadassah involved women in Jewish religious and scientific projects, broadly defined, within America. Let us begin with a question of religion: what kind of organization was (and is) Hadassah? Most obviously, Hadassah was not founded as a Religious Zionist organization such as the Mizrahi Women's Organization of America, whose aim was to cultivate Torah-observant Jewish life in the Holy Land. Instead, Hadassah was a self-described “Practical Zionist” organization, working to improve the medical system in Palestine (and later, Israel).² Such a characterization, however, misses the religious and spiritual impulses of Hadassah's early leaders, including Henrietta Szold and Irma Lindheim, who imagined their work would enrich American Judaism and also serve a universal purpose leading to the improvement of mankind. As Allon Gal has shown, Szold pushed for Hadassah to work toward “social justice and East/West reconciliation [and] the goal of peace,” alongside the establishment of medical care in pre-state Israel and the United States.³

Hadassah's sole periodical during the interwar period, *Hadassah News Letter*, makes it possible to trace not only the mobilization efforts of organizational elites during this period but also the reception of their projects among the American Jewish middle class. Far from mere highbrow debate, the periodical's editors and writers sought to provide the conceptual frames through which members of Hadassah could understand themselves as participants in a broader project of Jewish renewal, while local branches reported on the successes and failures of the organization's programs.



Henrietta Szold at AZMU headquarters in Jerusalem, c. 1920.

Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Jastrow Levin, JMM.1992.242.742a



Nurses Rachel Landy, Rose Kaplan, and Eva Leon outside AZMU headquarters, Jerusalem, 1913.

Collection of Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc., courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society. CP25.2016.5

From knitting circles to Purim parties in America, to the provision of prenatal care and hygiene guidance in Palestine, the pages of the *News Letter* show how Hadassah's women negotiated the boundaries of science, religion, and nation. This essay reframes Hadassah's work to expose the political uses of religion and science in the organization's transnational project to better both Palestine and America. Through a belief in scientific progress, a mothering ethic, and the enlistment of Jewish text and ritual, Hadassah built a new sacred temple devoted to the health and wellness of the Jewish future.

A "TEMPLE OF HEALTH" AND A LIVING MONUMENT OF JEWISH WOMANHOOD

Hadassah grew out of Henrietta Szold's vision for health in the Holy Land. Szold and the first members of Hadassah started small: by 1913 they had sent two nurses to Palestine to provide maternity care and clean milk. By the end of the First World War in 1918, Hadassah's team had grown to include doctors, nurses, sanitary workers, and dentists.⁴ In the years that followed, Hadassah would evolve from a medical organization into a network of modern healthcare, research, and educational institutions.

As two prominent men wrote in 1923, prior to the arrival of Hadassah, a hospital in Palestine was not a modern medical facility committed to science but a "Hekdesh." This Hebrew term originally referred to Temple-related property but, in the post-Temple era, came to connote religious charities. To call a hospital in Palestine a "Hekdesh" was to say that a stay there was more likely a death sentence than a source of healing: one would have to pray, for example, that illness did not strike during a holiday like Passover, when the hospital would close its doors to observe the festival regardless of the needs of patients.⁵ Hadassah's arrival heralded a modern, sanitary future that was not premised on leaving religiosity behind, just its arcane forms that were incompatible with modern life.



Hadassah nurse ministering to the "health and wellness of the Jewish future," 1920s.

Collection of the Isaac Kaplan Old Yishuv Court Museum. CP30.2016.2

Hadassah's Straus Health Center, built between 1927 and 1929, became a proud symbol of Jewish modernity that Szold hailed a "Temple of Health." This temple was not a place of old cultic ritual or ineffective charity for the sick; rather, it looked forward to the fulfillment of a moral vision aided by science and technology. The title of the article describing the dedication ceremony of the new facility, "Hanukat Habayit," is Hebrew: it translates as "dedication" but is also a phrase for the sacred work in the ancient Jewish Temple. The *News Letter's* editorial staff draws on the Jewish textual tradition to say that the health center's work is not only scientific, but also sacred.⁶

The new Temple of Health was more than a hospital. As Szold described, it was a center for preventative medicine, which meant it was not just a place to cure disease but also the larger ills of society. To do so required a larger social reform and education effort that Hadassah based on a combination of science and Jewish ethics, both of which, Szold suggested, have universal applicability. Quoting Szold's speech at the ceremony, the *News Letter* reinforced the compatibility between health objectives and Jewish tradition: "In Jewish ethics the inciter to evil is regarded as worse than the evildoer. The converse must be true as well: The inciter to good deeds is greater than he who executes them." The speech connects this Jewish ethical maxim to a public health aphorism applicable in a pluralistic society: "This temple to Preventative Medicine, the People's Health University, in the Holy City of many millions of the world's peoples, is the crowning of Nathan and Lina Straus's aspiration to [show...] communities in the New and the Old World [that...] an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." None too subtly, Szold presents Judaism and Jews as ecumenical, philanthropic, and at the cutting edge of science. She "pledges the American Women's Zionist Organization to crown its own work similarly, by centralizing its preventative undertakings" and directing them effectively to educate the

public “in the art of hygienic living.” The language of crowning is used repeatedly in the *News Letter* to suggest the nobility of Hadassah, which brought honor and dignity to the not-yet-modernized subjects of its uplift project.⁷

The values Hadassah applied to its work in Palestine reflected back on the American women who devoted countless hours and dollars to the cause. As one Hadassah member, Fannie Van Vliet of San Francisco, wrote after visiting Palestine, Hadassah brought “a sheltering hand” and “a sympathetic soul” into the lives of the “overburdened souls” who benefited from its sanitation and home economics education, its home delivery of sterile milk and food for babies, its maternity facilities for safer birthing, and its care for the needy and infirm. Hadassah’s work was “the living monument to Henrietta Szold, and to the Jewish womanhood of America.”⁸ The “living monument” language speaks volumes about the Hadassah project: far from a remnant of a battle lost, made of inert stone, Hadassah’s institutions brought a scientifically sound ethic of care that vibrantly testified to the spirit, if not presence, of American women. Jewish womanhood, led by Szold, had built a representation of its values, and in doing so, laid claim to the mantle of scientific and religious values alike.

The rank-and-file in America not only participated in Hadassah’s living health monuments through financial support but also through their own sacred work for the scientific cause. By weaving together the age-old feminine technology of sewing with new knowledge of Jewish culture and ritual life, Hadassah women in America shaped their own religious lives and the contours of American Jewish life as they worked for Palestine. In the first issue of the *News Letter* in March 1920, the editor, Mrs. Edward Jacobs, laid out the responsibilities of Hadassah members: making clothes for orphans, supplying hospital linens, supporting the Hadassah Nurse’s Training School in Jerusalem, and working in local district affairs.⁹ This work was not mere charity, but connected the volunteers to a larger moral project that involved technological progress, Jewish solidarity, and personal sacrifice.

As influential American Jewish educator Alexander M. Dushkin wrote in the *News Letter* in 1923, aside from the Hadassah Medical Unit, American Jewry served as an unreliable “milch cow” to Palestine. Unlike Eastern European Jewry, who gave “precious gifts, [and were] the example of moral courage and self-sacrifice,” Americans usually provided “the dead dollar, the passing tourist, and the occasional ‘expert’ administrator.” The “Greatest Mother in Israel” was the exception to the rule: “It has given Palestinian Jews a faith in



Bottom: Nurses and patients in a ward at Rothschild-Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, 1919.

Collection of Hadassah, The Women’s Zionist Organization of America, Inc., courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society. CP35.2016.2

Opposite: Henrietta Szold with American nurses, Haifa, 1920s.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jastrow Levin, JMM.1992.242.746





the moral fibre of American Jewry. It redeemed the soul of American Israel in Palestine because it showed that beneath our coat of smugness and apparent obtuseness there is a vibrant soul, capable of as great personal sacrifice as any other Jews. For wherever there was danger to health or life, there the Hadassah men and women were found.”¹⁰

It is no accident that Dushkin invoked the metaphor of the “milch cow.” Milk, a symbol of both maternity and biblical promise, was a main focus of Hadassah’s maternity and infant care. In the first decade of its existence, Hadassah set up *Tipat Halav* (A Drop of Milk) infant wellness clinics, which imported modern, scientific standards of care from America to Palestine. An image of “The Donkey Express,” used to carry pasteurized milk from a central pasteurization kitchen to mothers and clinics across Palestine, became iconic of Hadassah’s work.¹¹

The image conjoined the humble, Old World figure of the donkey with a celebrated modern innovation: pasteurized milk, which symbolized the ability of modern science to uplift and save, since the purification of milk eliminated many diseases. Among other things, impure milk was seen as a major cause of tuberculosis, which not only disproportionately afflicted the poor but also was frequently associated with immigrant Jews in America. Macy’s Department Store magnate-philanthropist Nathan Straus and his wife Lina not only funded the Hadassah Health Centre but were also the leading advocates of milk pasteurization in the U.S. and Palestine. They even developed the “Nathan Straus Home Pasteurizer” device, which they made widely accessible by printing directions for its manufacture, use, and purchase in a 1913 work, *Disease in Milk: The Remedy, Pasteurization*.



Top: Coin pouch used by Hadassah volunteers in America to collect money for Hadassah’s “Drop of Milk” project in Palestine, 1920s.

Collection of Hadassah, The Women’s Zionist Organization of America, Inc., courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society. CP35.2016.4



Bottom: *Tipat Halav* nurses prepare pasteurized milk in Jerusalem, 1925.

Collection of the Isaac Kaplan Old Yishuv Court Museum. CP30.2016.001

Opposite: Hadassah benefactors Nathan and Lina Straus were the leading advocates of milk pasteurization in the United States and Palestine. Shown here in 1925.

Courtesy of Straus Historical Society. CP1.2016.1

But if the flashiest new technologies undergirded Hadassah's milk purification work in Palestine, women and girls across America contributed materially through the much older technology of needle and thread. During the national campaign of 1922, Hadassah solicited funds for infant welfare work by sending around 10,000 white satin bags, which were cut in the shape of milk bottles by Hadassah women, stamped with the Hadassah logo, and then sewn by the girls of the Hebrew Technical School in New York City.¹² These symbolic milk bottles were disseminated to encourage Americans to contribute funds to the ongoing infant welfare work in Palestine. Other Hadassah fundraising drives produced or collected supplies for hospitals and welfare work, such as linens, wash cloths, baby layettes, soap, cod liver oil, and mosquito netting.

Hadassah used Jewish holidays, especially Purim and Hanukah, as occasions for such collections, the former because of its association with Hadassah's archetypal hero Esther and the anniversary of Hadassah's founding on Purim in 1912, and the latter because it was an occasion for gift-giving in American culture.¹³ Holidays became not only celebrations of the lunar calendar or divine delivery but also worldly celebrations that stocked the shelves of Palestine's clinics and enabled good hygiene in its hospitals.

The traditionally feminine act of sewing physically linked Hadassah women in America to the medical system in Palestine. A 1928 article reported that approximately 800 sewing circles made up of members of all ages, from Hadassah buds (ages twelve to eighteen) to adults, worked on behalf of the Palestine Supplies Department. Sewing linens and garments for hospitals and the general population of Palestine, women took part in a technological system that brought them closer to, or as one article imagined, transformed them into, *chalutzot* (pioneers). By taking part in the sewing circles, women demonstrated "their devotion to Eretz Yisroel."¹⁴ Such language suggests that sewing served as a show of loyalty and also as a kind of ritual practice.

Sewing therefore became a religious act within a medical system: through it, women were spiritually transported and enmeshed in a community that spanned generations and continents and in a production process that turned a devotional craft into a modern supply chain for Palestine's "Temples of Health." Thus, the label of "Practical Zionism" is at once illustrative and misleading. Hadassah's work was indeed pragmatic, but it was also cultural, spiritual, and religious, challenging binaries of "science" and "religion" that we now use unquestioningly. Furthermore, though Hadassah mobilized women for the cause of progress in Palestine, their work elevated women's spiritual lives and trained them to take charge of broader roles within their own families and communities.



Hadassah sewing circle, Atlanta.

Photo, n.d. Courtesy of the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History of the Breman Museum. CP37.2016.1

HADASSAH'S RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL "CURE AND SELF-CURE"

The women who participated in Hadassah's philanthropic projects not only shaped Palestine, but were themselves transformed by their work. Hadassah's leadership sought to fortify the American Jewish community by instilling knowledge of Jewish religion and culture. For Nima Adlerblum, founder of Hadassah's national cultural and educational program, the medical program depended on this fundamental cultural work. "Although it may not be obvious to casual observation, Hadassah has always been an educational institution," she wrote. Knowledge of the Hebrew language, Jewish history, and Zionism, she explained, were essential to connect Americans to Palestine and to transform American women's lives. "Participating in the reconstruction of Palestine, Hadassah women have introduced a new language, new interests, other significances into their lives. *Zionism, Palestine, the Jewish people* – the consciousness of these words influences our lives from day to day, as we use them more and more."¹⁵ With eyes set on Palestine, Hadassah women were providing themselves with new purpose, enriching their daily existence, and gaining new skills.

Service to Hadassah provided American women with training to work outside the home, skills to participate in public life, and education on how to maintain a Jewish home. As Hadassah leader Lotta Levensohn wrote in 1930, Henrietta Szold, who held the first Hadassah meetings in her "own charming home," was a "busy professional woman." She trained women around her, most of whom "were distinguished more by their zeal than by any special capacity for the tasks before them," to take on the challenges of institution-building. "Women accustomed to nothing more than simple housekeeping accounts became expert in financial affairs: leaders of small clubs learned to apply large-scale organization methods to chapters with hundreds of members; girls too timid to stand up in open meeting became platform speakers." Even those with professional training took on new roles. "Office workers became presiding officers;...lawyers led

Hadassah nurses treating kindergarten children in Jerusalem, c. 1925.

Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives. CP36.2016.2



study groups; physicians found themselves in their element." Hadassah's "great army of housewives" got to experience a broader world, expanding their sympathies and activities "beyond their own homes and their local charities."¹⁶

Szold and the organization she led were a model of democratic values, Levensohn continued, showing that every woman, no matter how "humble her education or abilities, could contribute something of value." The work took self-sacrifice and discipline, and the "army" grew in character as its members came to embody other virtues modeled by Szold: thoroughness, teamwork, modesty, humility, and selflessness. Hadassah's cause was "a peculiar modern recurrence of the fitful fever of Messianism" and its leader, Szold, a new prophet.¹⁷

While Levensohn focused on building skills and developing character, Adlerblum emphasized education in religion and culture as the means to mobilize women for a brighter future. "A new light has been shed upon Jewish history," she wrote. "It is no longer the history of a dispersed, suffering, persecuted people, but a history which translates itself into hopes, persistence, and self-preservation."¹⁸ Mothers would be key architects of this future: by educating them, Hadassah leaders hoped they would instruct their children in how to see the Jewish people anew.

The strategy for transforming American Jewish women rested on a renewed spiritual life and ritual practice. In her 1923 article "A Tree Planted on the Streams of Water," an allusion to Psalm 1:3, Adlerblum portrayed a man living by the laws of God as a tree who is happy, bears fruit, maintains health, and prospers. She wrote of the growing purview of American women, who were becoming, through Hadassah, mothers of the Jewish nation: "Her instinct for creation has suddenly widened itself and she yearns to create not merely a child but a nation. The concrete embodiment of these yearnings took the shape of Hadassah." If the language of "the living monument" emphasized the religious values embodied in a Temple of Health, here Adlerblum describes how the modern Jewish woman could absorb these same values to act as a healer and creator for herself and her people. To do so, she would draw on modern technologies like motor power as well as age-old sweat of the brow to turn feeble "impulses, dreams, and feelings" into "concrete monuments" that would change the face of Jewry:

[Hadassah] is the medium whereby the individual submerges into the whole and the whole expresses itself through the individual. It is a double process of creation and self-transformation, of cure and self-cure. The soul becomes so transformed in the process of the task that Hadassah has evolved a new type of Jewish woman – a type which by helping perpetuate her own people is recreating her own self. A Jewish community with a Hadassah in its midst is like "a tree planted on the streams of water." Plant a Hadassah Chapter in a community and the Jewish blood flows with new vigor through its veins.¹⁹

Adlerblum mixes religious and scientific registers, shifting from transcendental language reminiscent of Emerson, wherein the individual and the whole merge; echoes of American spirituality and the therapeutic culture of New Thought and Christian Science; and a Psalm, to show how Hadassah's work reinvigorates the American woman and the American Jewish community more broadly.²⁰

No doubt prescriptive as well as descriptive, Adlerblum went on to report what she saw as she toured American Jewish communities in unexpected places like Bangor, Maine, and North Adams, Massachusetts. Hadassah chapters were growing “like the plant of Jonah,” a gift from God to bring physical comfort to the prophet who has finally decided to fulfill his mission.²¹ Not only was Hadassah an outgrowth of a prophetic mission, it was an essential element of Jewish cultural renewal, connecting generations of women alienated from Judaism and each other by the disruptions of immigration and assimilation. Hadassah was the language that could bridge Yiddish-speaking grandmothers and their Americanized “bobbed-haired grand-daughters.” Furthermore, the women she encountered at Hadassah events performed Jewish family rituals in these public settings: sitting under the “vacillating lights of an old candelabra,” they ate gefilte fish and challah and listened to the songs of a cantor. Jewish holidays like “Hanucah, Purim, [and] Fruit Day” were likewise reinvigorated through Hadassah and the community it created.²²

A salve, a vitality, and a language for revitalization, Hadassah became a lofty prophetess to modern Jewry, bringing relief after the disaster of the Great War and the perpetual suffering of Jewish exile. Hadassah was everywhere, a spiritual lifeblood seeping from town to town and sweeping across the globe, reframing the past and reformulating the present. The combination of Jewish ritual, textual allusion, and spiritual language painted a picture of Adlerblum’s vision for Jewish communal life, one that served as a model for readers of the *News Letter* to try to emulate in their own chapters.

Jewish communal life and Zionist work were not to disrupt the sacredness of the Jewish home. Mignon L. Rubenovitz, the wife of Conservative Rabbi Herman H. Rubenovitz, was an educator, writer, preacher, and Judaica curator. She led Baltimore’s first Hadassah chapter, later founded the Boston chapter, and served nationally as the senior advisor to Junior Hadassah.²³ A model of women’s leadership, Rubenovitz took to the pages of the *News Letter* to emphasize the importance of Jewish women’s traditional roles. She described the changing purview of Jewish women: “The generation of Jewish women who preceded us lived within a magic circle whose circumference was rarely disturbed by things non-Jewish.” In the past, the home had been “the only sphere in which women moved and achieved.... Today there is no circumscribed area – physical or mental or spiritual.” Yet this freedom came with a price: without knowledge of her religion, the modern Jewess would lose her positive relationship to Judaism.²⁴

Women could now turn to books, promoted and reviewed in the *News Letter*, to re-learn the Jewish tradition. Rubenovitz reviewed one popular text, Deborah Melamed’s *The Three Pillars*, in 1927. She deemed Melamed’s primer essential reading for the modern American Jewess, who was now disconnected from “the duties and privileges that have until our time comprised the life of the Jewish home-maker, mother, and wife.” *The Three Pillars* stepped in to fill the gap, instructing women on Jewish ritual, the Bible, and history. The Sabbath is given a central place as “the greatest of all Jewish institutions” and the stages of a Jewish life cycle are outlined. The Jewess’s history and destiny were linked, Rubenovitz declared, and it was the job of American Jewish mothers to teach their daughters.²⁵

The renewal of ritual, in turn, promoted the Hadassah cause. The annual Hadassah Sabbath, for example, served as a membership drive to recruit more women. Whether Orthodox or Reform, congregations nationwide could rally behind Hadassah: “There is something very beautiful in the conception of a Hadassah Sabbath – a day in the Synagogues of America dedicated to the organization whose service is healing.” By “knitting Jewish women into Palestine through Hadassah,” more care could be provided to the sick and needy, especially children. The “net work [sic] of good” that connected American women to healthcare initiatives in Palestine was also a network of spiritual light: “Every Sabbath shines because candles are lit; the Hadassah Sabbath will help illuminate Palestine.”²⁶ Jewish women, who are traditionally responsible for lighting the Sabbath candles in their homes, were now involved in a transnational effort to provide healthcare. While the biblical prophet Isaiah imagined Jews as a Chosen People, Hadassah saw American women as “a light to the nations,” models of morality who also heralded scientific progress. Through the image of light, Hadassah promoted philanthropic giving, Jewish unity, participation in synagogues, and the promise that good work would modernize the Holy Land.

A Hadassah nurse teaches nutrition to local Jewish mothers, c. 1920s.

Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives. CP36.2016.3





AMERICANIZING PALESTINE, PERFORMING (AND ERASING) CULTURE

To modernize the Holy Land, in a sense, meant to Americanize it. Hadassah worked to remake Palestine in its own image. Its mothers had to be taught to be self-sufficient, hygienic, and efficient. Though most American Hadassah women never made it to Palestine, Hadassah nurses took on the mothering role, attempting to raise the Jews of Palestine up to American standards.

Hadassah initiated sewing groups, like those in America, to help young mothers pull themselves up by their baby booty straps and to inculcate them into modern American norms of childrearing. During the 1920s, Hadassah began to emphasize teaching mothers to sew their own baby outfits made from donated supplies. The initiation of sewing groups, an idea that the *News Letter* said “sounds simple enough,” was nothing short of a “revolution” to mothers in Jerusalem, who had come to rely on faith and charity, which rendered them helpless.²⁷ Instead of divine and American handouts, women would gain skills and knowledge to transform themselves and their society.

The kind of medical modernity that Hadassah wished to bring about did not just rely on scientific practices, but also on the metaphorical chicken soup. Infant welfare stations, for example, were not just medical spaces with room for doctor consultations, milk preparation, baby weighing, and a bed for delivery. Bertha Landsman described her

“Telling the mothers that milk makes muscles” at the Stuyvesant Neighborhood House in New York’s Lower East Side, 1919.

Courtesy of the Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, with permission from Educational Alliance, Inc. CP2.2016.5

station in the Old City of Jerusalem as cheerful, pleasant, sunny, and colorful – in contrast to photos throughout the *News Letter* showing dirty streets where swarms of poor Jews dressed in dark colors stood out against large blocks of Jerusalem stone.²⁸ Hadassah created an atmosphere of warmth and comfort. As mothers chattered and looked out at the idyllic hills from the porch, nurses instructed them in topics from nutrition to dental care. In an exuberant essay titled “*Joie de Vivre*,” Tamar de Sola Pool described the brightness that Hadassah nurses brought to their work, both through their light blue uniforms and their positive dispositions. They also brought a homey-ness to the hospital setting: “In this respect, as in many others, Hadassah set a new standard for Palestine and awakened new ideas of home-making.” She described the nurses as “godmothers” to the people of Palestine.²⁹

Indeed, to raise Palestine’s Jews up, Hadassah drew on the familiar feminine roles of mother and sister, who would cultivate values among the Jews of Palestine. Jessie Sampter’s description of her visit to the Rothschild hospital in her essay “*Bed Number Six*” captured Hadassah’s image of a feminine Jewish medicine, ministered by nurses who went by the title of “*Ahiot*,” sister in Hebrew. Most of the nurses she encountered were not American but young natives presumably trained in Hadassah’s nursing school. Sampter’s description highlighted their meek and unassuming natures and efficient activity. She commented that some criticized them for “lack[ing] the dignity one expects in a trained nurse,” perhaps a means of differentiating them from more refined Americans. Sampter’s response, however, suggests they had an overabundance of another quality, “loving kindness,” which more than compensated. The phrase “loving kindness” is religious language, a common translation of the Hebrew term *Hesed*, an attribute of God and of the righteous. Through the image of the nurse/sister, Sampter depicts models of modernized femininity, still offering sisterly guidance, but well-cultivated to tend the modern temples of health and Jewish values.³⁰

With hospital like home, medical spaces became ritual spaces, at least in Sampter’s presentation to American audiences. Sampter evocatively described the lighting of the Shabbat candles, a potent Hadassah symbol of the Jewish home:

The little blue nurse comes into the women’s ward carrying a tray full of unlighted candles. She goes from bed to bed. “Blessed art Thou –” Now that is the Ashkenazic widow, worrying over her three little boys at home, who has put a towel over her head for a cap, and blesses her candle. Then she smiles at me through the mist in her blue eyes. “Gut Shabbos” – “Shabbat shalom!” “It is my turn. God bless Hadassah! And forgive me if I am too proud of her!”³¹

This depiction of the polite and orderly Judaism of the modern Hadassah hospital has a similar feel to Adlerblum’s description of New England Hadassah chapters: enlightened by modern values and Jewish tradition, by both medicine and prayer, the women consecrated Shabbat, “the greatest of all Jewish institutions.”³² The Temple of Health took on the feeling of a happy, idyllic Jewish home. A visitor from Norfolk, Virginia, reported she had “a fever of excitement to rush home and tell my Chapter what I had seen,” namely that even the sick looked happy and satisfied by the quality of care they were receiving.³³

Historian Erica Simmons has labeled Hadassah’s work a kind of “progressive maternalism” which combined faith in the unbridled power of science with the conviction that American women knew best. Their modern way of mothering, influenced by scientific precision, would uplift Palestine. During the Progressive Era, this belief in science became a totalizing ideology, where science was seen as the ultimate form of knowledge that could impart its wisdom upon all other parts of society. Science’s superiority was reinforced through distinction from other belief systems, including religion. In this context, rationalized religion was seen as superior to forms associated with superstition or magic.³⁴

Through this hierarchy, Americans denigrated the customs of women raised in Palestine. Furthermore, the superstitions and dirt of easterners were a foil against which the Americans could measure themselves: by aligning with “proper” forms of Jewish motherhood, Hadassah women distinguished themselves from the undignified other. One visiting Hadassah member from Newark, New Jersey, described the thankfulness of the young mothers who themselves needed mothering and reassurance, which the Hadassah nurses, trained in the best scientific practices, provided them. Another article recounted a nurse’s instructions to mothers: ““Don’t take advice from your mothers or mothers-in-law.... Come and ask us your questions.””³⁵ Unlike the project in America, which sought to reinstate mother-to-daughter education, in Palestine Hadassah worked to disrupt these links.

As science was juxtaposed to superstition, Ashkenazi Jews were compared, favorably, to the inferior easterners, both Jews and Arabs. The people of the eastern lands relied on “amulets and conjuring formulas” as well as “barbaric” healing practices.³⁶ In a humorous yet “typical” example of the “superstitions and foolish customs” of women from the East, infant welfare nurse Rachel Pesah described their unfamiliarity with technology: “Of divisions of time and the clock the women have no notion whatever. A thermometer to them is an instrument which draws out the fever or a cigarette of some kind whose failure to give forth smoke constitutes unfathomable mystery.”³⁷

The remedy to their “filth and ignorance” was to combat their “degenerate” traditions through public health education and preventative medicine, hailed by former Hadassah Medical Organization Director E.M. Bluestone as “one of the proudest achievements of modern history,” having evolved and surpassed curative medicine over the past fifty years. Moreover, Dr. Bluestone noted, “The eagerness of communities to make proper use of medical inventions and discoveries may now be taken as an index of their culture.”³⁸ If Hadassah could remake the home, replacing eastern women’s traditions with scientific knowledge, they could bring Palestine up to date. By taking authority away from superstitious mothers and placing it on “godmothers” like those little blue “sisters,” and by moving the site of education out of the home and into public spaces like modernized schools and hospitals, Hadassah strove to remake Palestine into an orderly, unified community.



Judging a “Better Babies” competition in Indiana, 1931.

Courtesy of the Indiana State Archives. CP2.2015.1

Public spaces, more easily controllable, came to substitute for the home as sites of health and hygiene education. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues in her study of tourism and museum exhibits, acts of displaying and performing produce heritage.³⁹ But exhibits and displays can also erase certain aspects of culture. In its public activities, Hadassah promoted an Ashkenazi, Americanized vision of how Jews should live, erasing local Jewish traditions.

In Palestine, Hadassah hosted contests with prizes for “Better Babies,” replicating a practice popular across America. Unlike in America, however, prizes were not awarded to “the best-developed babies,” because conditions in Palestine as well as disparities in ethnic background would make the competition unfair: “What might be considered a well-developed Yemenite baby would be below par if its parentage were Ashkenazic, from Poland, or Russia, or Germany. Prizes, therefore, cannot yet be distributed for babies but to the mothers – not for the best results, but for the greatest effort put forth.”⁴⁰ Since the aim was pedagogical, naming winners based on babies would be contrary to the goal, and end up frustrating the mothers Hadassah was trying to inspire. The American belief in science needed to be tempered by an ideology of unity and sisterhood.

Hadassah used its founding holiday to bring all of Palestine together in the cause of healthy living. Purim became Health Day, an annual celebration featuring events and exhibitions held at schoolhouses, synagogues, and other venues across the land. A 1925 *News Letter* article, for example, described a full schedule of lectures and demonstrations that covered different health topics each day and brought together people of all ages, backgrounds, and professions. There were talks by physicians, male and female, some for women only, presumably on issues of women's health. The article reported the exact numbers of sites, physicians, and participants, listing the range of people who attended. "The audiences were drawn from all strata of the population, from both the old and the new settlement. There were Ashkenazim of the old type, Haluzim, Sefardim, Yemenites, Bokharans, Kurds." In Tiberias, the program even attracted Arab women.⁴¹

Newspapers spread the message of Health Day, striking a range of notes to have a broad appeal. Printed mottos such as "Cleanliness is length of days" and "Cleanliness brings economic prosperity" were interspersed between articles written by physicians. Health Day organizers produced leaflets and brochures with titles such as "Ten Commandments on Personal Hygiene" and "Rules of the Game of Health." Health became almost like a new kind of religion, with its own doctrines and dogmas. Health Day had something for everybody, the article declared, from "the educators, the city and governmental authorities, the health agencies, the physicians, the dentists, the druggists, the pharmacists, the engineers, the architects, the shopkeepers, the housewives – to the whole public."⁴² All of these members of the Jewish community in Palestine came together to learn better living through chemistry, brought by Hadassah.

At Health Day, Hadassah put its values on display. One of the most popular exhibits takes us back to the heart of the Hadassah mission: maternity care and infant welfare. As the private space of the home was put on public view, the exhibit used technology to moralize: it presented model rooms in the house of "Mrs. Don't Care" and "Mrs. Do



Women speak with a nurse outside the Hadassah clinic for infants in Jerusalem, c. 1930.

Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives. CP36.2016.1

Care." The bad mother's house was crowded, filthy, unsanitary, disorganized, and populated by animals and children – a veritable pigsty. The good mother's home was white, clean, and properly middle class. Rational religion and science were celebrated while their "others" – whether magic, pseudo-science, superstition, or any number of pejorative labels to describe the practices of eastern women – were put down.⁴³ In Mrs. Do Care's home, Hadassah celebrated the way of life and values of the American middle class in opposition to the eastern other. Through displays and exhibits, Hadassah in Palestine disrupted the boundaries between public and private, and opened up possibilities for women's liberation at the expense of certain forms of belief and practice.

CONCLUSION

In the pages of the *News Letter*, Hadassah defined the right way to live, scientifically and religiously. Depictions of Palestine acted as a mirror for American women, allowing them to reflect on their own self-image and place in American Jewish life. As American women reported on their work to purify Palestine of amulets and germs, they revealed their efforts to seize professional opportunity and obtain middle class respectability in a Protestant-majority America that believed deeply in the power of science and rational forms of religion. To echo Nima Adlerblum's language, they combined the candelabra, gefilte fish, and challah, with the birthing of children, nursing of the sick, and purifying of milk. Working on both sides of the Atlantic, they promoted the physical and moral cultivation of a Jewish nation. The characteristically feminine qualities of caring, warmth, mothering, and feeding were integral to an explicitly scientific and religious project that migrated out of the home and crossed and challenged national boundaries.

Hadassah's philanthropic activities were not only inseparable from a scientific project but also reinforced Jewish communal bonds. The *News Letter* itself facilitated a unification of women across America and also served a motivational and educational role: through it, Jewish women met their sisters in the cause and saw the distant Holy Land for which they worked. On the pages of the periodical, a variety of forms of religious life emerged as women came together in community.

The story of American women's work in and for Palestine, as Hadassah presented it in its *News Letter*, is not just one of an ideological takeover but of competing categories, including east and west, religion and science, superstition and spirituality, and women's and men's power. These negotiations were not just rhetorical but also had consequences for the lives of women (and men) in Palestine and America. To designate something as science or religion – or outside of these, like superstition – is to make a judgment about utility and value: about who and what should be included and excluded from positions of power.

The same political negotiations are alive and well today. Descriptions of scientific and religious values, beliefs, ideas, and practices still structure the norms by which people live. Like Hadassah's exhibitions and educational programs, *Beyond Chicken Soup*, both consciously and unconsciously, has embraced and challenged claims about practices, artifacts, and values that are more or less relevant to science and medicine and to Jewish communal life. It raises a challenge: how does this exhibit shape Jewish communal life today?



1. Erica B. Simmons, “Hadassah and the Zionist Project” (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 14; Mirah Katsburg-Yungman, “Hadassah: American Women Zionists and the Rebirth of Israel,” trans. Tammy Berkowitz (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 1; “Why Hadassah Grows: An Interview with Henrietta Szold,” *Hadassah News Letter* 7, no. 4 (1927): 3.

2. Hadassah, “History,” hadassah.org/about/history.html, accessed Dec. 19, 2015.

3. Allon Gal, “The Mission Motif in American Zionism (1898-1948),” *American Jewish History* 75, no. 4 (1986).

4. Hadassah, “History.”

5. Samson Benderly, “Hadassah’s Contribution to Palestine,” *News Letter* 3, no. 6 (1923); Moses Smilansky and translator Henrietta Szold, “Hadassah,” translated from *Ha-Aretz*, *News Letter* 4, no. 5 (1923).

6. “Temple of Heath,” *News Letter* 7, no. 7 (1927); “Hanukat Habayit,” *News Letter* 9, no. 8 (1929).

7. “Hanukat Habayit;” “To Crown Hadassah’s Work,” *News Letter* 6, no. 9 (1926).

8. “A Visit to Jerusalem,” *News Letter* 7, no. 5 (1927).

9. “Object,” *News Letter* 1, no. 1 (1920). The *News Letter* replaced the *Hadassah Bulletin*, which had been sent directly to members. The change reflected a shift in institutional structure. Women were now organized into districts and the *News Letter* was sent to district leaders to read to women at local meetings.

10. Alexander M. Dushkin, “Hadassah a Great Mother and a Great Teacher,” *News Letter* 3, no. 6 (1923): 12.

11. See for example “The Donkey Express,” *News Letter* 6 (1926): 1.

12. “The Milk Bottle,” *News Letter* 3, no. 3 (1922).

13. See for example “Chapter News,” *News Letter* 1, no. 8 (1921); “Chapter Activities,” *News Letter* 7, no. 8 (1927); Miriam R. Ephraim, “Purim Festival in Palestine,” *News Letter* 8, no. 15 (1928).

14. Ruth B. Fromenson, “The Palestine Supplies Bureau,” *News Letter* 8, no. 15 (1928): 12.

15. “Editorial Note,” *News Letter* 6, no. 6 (1926). Adlerblum, whose sisters Tamar de Sola Pool and Tehillah Lichtenstein were also influential Jewish leaders, was part of the Hadassah elite and served on Hadassah’s national board for thirteen years. Her educational mission was influenced by John Dewey, a close colleague from her time at Columbia University, from which she held a doctorate.

16. Lotta Levensohn, “Miss Szold as a Leader of Women,” *News Letter* 11, no. 3 (1930).

17. Ibid.

18. Nima Adlerblum, “Books and Programs: Hadassah Cultural Work,” *News Letter* 5 (1925).

19. Nima Adlerblum, “A Tree Planted on the Streams of Water,” *News Letter* 3, no. 6 (1923): 15.

20. Adlerblum’s sister, Tehillah Lichtenstein, was an influential leader in a Jewish spinoff of Christian Science. Ellen M. Umansky, *From Christian Science to Jewish Science: Spiritual Healing and American Jews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

21. Jonah 4:6.

22. Adlerblum, “A Tree Planted on the Streams of Water,” 15. Jessie Sampter, another prominent Hadassah woman, wrote a piece of prophetic literature which similarly pictures Hadassah as part of a messianic future. Jessie E. Sampter, *The Book of the Nations (Sefer Ha-Goyim)* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1917).

23. Shuly Rubin Schwartz, *The Rabbi’s Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 1, 92-101.

24. Mignon L. Rubenovitz, “The Three Pillars by Deborah M. Melamed,” *News Letter* 7, no. 12 (1927).

25. Ibid.

26. “The Hadassah Sabbath,” *News Letter* 7, no. 2 (1926): 2.

27. “Infant Welfare,” *News Letter* 5, no. 2 (1924); “A Sewing Group,” *News Letter* 9, no. 10 (1928).

28. “Infant Welfare.”

29. Tamar de Sola Pool, “Joie De Vivre,” *News Letter* 3, no. 6 (1923).

30. Jessie E. Sampter, “Bed Number Six,” *News Letter* 2, no. 4 (1922).

31. Ibid.

32. Rubenovitz, “The Three Pillars.”

33. “Members of Hadassah after a Visit to Palestine,” *News Letter* 3, no. 6 (1923).

34. Simmons, “Hadassah and the Zionist Project.” On science and religion, see Peter Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire: Classifying Hinduism and Islam in British India* (2015); Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

35. “Members of Hadassah after a Visit to Palestine;” “Hadassah’s Baby Insurance through Education,” *News Letter* 7, no. 13 (1928).

36. “Infant Welfare Work in Palestine,” *News Letter* 7, no. 3 (1926).

37. Rachel Pesah, “What a Nurse Sees,” *News Letter* 8, no. 27 (1928). The same issue also has an article that makes explicit reference to eugenics, referring the reader to research published in a eugenics journal.

38. E.M. Bluestone, “Health, Homeland and Hadassah,” *News Letter* 10, no. 5 (1930): 7.

39. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

40. “New Hospital – Other Notes,” *News Letter* 7, no. 5 (1927).

41. “Health Week in Palestine: November 17-21, 1924,” *News Letter* 5, no. 3 (1925).

42. Ibid.

43. “Hadassah’s Work at Exposition,” *News Letter* 9, no. 8 (1929).