



Rabba Wendy Amsellem

This morning I attended the funeral of a dear teacher of mine, Rabbi Moshe Kahn z"l. Rabbi Kahn dedicated his life to teaching Torah, mostly to women at Stern College and at Drisha, but also to the lucky men who attended his nighttime shiurim. One of the sentiments expressed in the many beautiful eulogies was that Rabbi Kahn never thought that teaching women Torah was less important than teaching men and he had the same high expectations of female students that one would have of men. While this was undoubtedly true, I also found it surprising to hear it expressed. As Rabbi Kahn's student for three years, it never occurred to me that he might have thought otherwise.

I studied with Rabbi Kahn in the Drisha Scholar's Circle from 1997-2000. He introduced me to the serious study of halakha, a journey that I now joyfully replicate myself as a teacher of halakha. Rabbi Kahn's class was about empowerment through interpretation. He would teach us how to understand the texts of our tradition. What we chose to do with our learning was outside the scope of the class.

In my second year at Drisha, we studied Hilkhhot Niddah with Rabbi Kahn. Many of my classmates and I were dismayed by the language our tradition used to describe our bodies and our proclivities. Rabbi Kahn did not ever try to explain away our concerns. Instead, he would agree that the matter was difficult and then move forward in the text. The message was that we still need to work to understand the gemara and rishonim, even when they anger or sadden us. Empowerment through interpretation.

Rabbanit Sally Mayer said in her hesped that if you know a woman teaching Talmud in America today, she most likely studied either with Rabbi Kahn or with one of Rabbi Kahn's students. We who were privileged to learn from Rabbi Kahn carry forward a legacy of intellectual rigor, fealty to the words of the texts, and a dedication to the endeavor of close reading. We take our Torah learning seriously because Rabbi Kahn never gave us any reason to question its significance.

יהי זכרו ברוך

