

**Eshet Hazon Goes Public as a Model of Empowerment:
25 years later at the ALEPH Kallah
Rabbi Hanna Tiferet Siegel**

Thursday night at the 2007 Kallah marked the 25th anniversary of the transmission of the *Eshet Hazon* (Woman of Vision) title. This ritual was first brought into the world for Hanna Tiferet Siegel in May 1982 by a circle of holy *Shekhina* sisters at a Shavuot Retreat in Olympia, WA. The original visionaries included Shonna Husbands-Hankin, Judith Hankin, and Geela Rayzel Raphael. In 1985, Ayla Grafstein was the second woman to receive the title at a women's gathering at *Shivtei Shalom*, an intentional community in Oregon. The inspiration to honor our women leaders was birthed before there was an ALEPH, before there was a term called Jewish Renewal, and before many women had received rabbinic ordination.

The phenomenon of naming *N'shei Hazon* is not an organization but an intuitive affirmation of women who are attuned to the work and the joy of holding sacred energy in all its varied forms including the arts, teaching, organizational skills, healing, music, etc. About 36 women have publicly received the title of *Eshet Hazon*. Ten younger women were acknowledged at the 2005 Kallah with the title *Bat Kol* (Daughter of the *Shekhina's* Voice), for their inspired work and burgeoning gifts to the renewal of Judaism. The transmission process has evolved over time. It has been passed down in some local communities but more often in spontaneously designed ceremonies at the various Kallahs. As the Kallah grew larger, the ceremonies became more private. At the 2007 Kallah, we wanted to bring it once again into a public venue so that it was accessible to everyone and might serve as a model for local communities.

Eshet Hazon has traditionally been given to women who have not been ordained as rabbis, cantors, or rabbinic pastors, since that lineage carries its own deep blessings and *kavod* (honor). Some of the women who have received the *Eshet Hazon* title have gone on to become ordained in other ways, but the original intention was to honor women who have not yet been recognized publicly for their spiritual service.

On the evening of July 5, 2007, we recognized four women attending the Kallah, each of whose life work revealed her heart connection to being a channel for the *Shekhina*. Each has served with humility in her local community and her gifts and teachings have rippled into the world beyond. The women who were welcomed into this circle were Ellen Kaufman Dosick, Debra Kolodny, Miriam Ohevet-El, and Rhonda Mason.

The room was prepared with beautiful cloths and ritual objects and there was an air of anticipation as Shefa Gold led a chant. Hanna Tiferet began telling the herstory of the ceremony and then other *N'shei Hazon* were inspired to stand and recount their own particular experiences during the last 25 years. The four newly acknowledged women were escorted to their seats in the center of the room. Each one was blessed with words, fanciful *kippot*, and sacred crystals. Matia Rania Angelou offered the *Kos* (cup) *Miriam* ritual and Sharon Alexander brought chocolates from Switzerland. Beauty, gratitude, love, and laughter filled the room.

Each ceremony is a unique, memorable and uplifting experience. As we were leaving, the men in attendance, who were deeply moved, were actively discussing how to develop a similar ceremony for men. There are many women and men who serve our communities with love and devotion. May we find creative and appropriate ways to name, honor, and support their gifts and generosity of spirit.

For more information about how to bring the *Eshet Hazon* ceremony to your community, contact Hanna Tiferet so she can connect you to Women of Vision who live close to you.

HannaT@telus.net