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Orthodox irate over women rabbis' prayer at Western Wall

By [Cnaan Liphshiz](#), Haaretz Correspondent

North American female rabbis from the Reform Movement stirred up controversy at the Western Wall Wednesday, when they defied Orthodox Jewish customs by praying and singing aloud while wearing prayer shawls and skull caps at the holy site.

The women, who are in Israel for a gathering of the **Central Conference of American Rabbis**, arrived at the Western Wall at about 7 A.M. along with members of the Women of the Wall organization, which regularly organizes prayers at the site for ultra-Orthodox, Reform and Conservative women.

"There were about 70 of us praying when someone from the men's section started shouting that 'a woman's voice is lewd' and that our singing was offensive," said Anat Hoffman, an activist for Reform Judaism in Israel who attended the prayer. "I was ashamed in front of the guests from America."

Jackie Ellenson, one of the visitors who attended the prayer, told Haaretz that several ultra-Orthodox women then approached and demanded that the Reform prayers remain quiet and that the women rabbis take off the shawls and skull caps.

The Orthodox women, according to Hoffman, called the police after presenting themselves as the Western Wall "chastity keepers."

"These chastity keepers were loud and very rude, but there was no violence," Hoffman said. Hod Hasharon's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Reuven Hiller - an outspoken critic of the Reform Movement - called the act "an unnecessary provocation," adding, "They may pray in their synagogues with shawls but why come to a place revered by all sects and offend people there?"

Ellenson - the wife of Hebrew Union College President David Ellenson - also noted the Wall was sacred to all Jews in explaining the prayer.

"The ultra-Orthodox movement does not own the Wall," she said. "All Jews own it."

Merav Seger, media spokesperson for the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) - the Reform Movement's legal arm - said the incident erupted because the prayer, "included more woman than usual and their prayer was a bit louder than usual."

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1067028.html>