

Prof. Gilligan's visit to the Knesset – May 17, 2017

I was delighted to host New York University Prof. Carol Gilligan this morning at the Jerusalem Hall in the Knesset. On behalf of myself and my staff, we deeply thank her for graciously accepting my invitation to speak before 150 women and men about the "politics of listening". We were absolutely honored to be in her presence.

As a prominent American feminist and psychologist, Prof. Gilligan sensitively laid out insights and thoughts about contemporary challenges for women in Israel and around the world. At the opening, Prof. Gilligan mentioned Spinoza's argument for Democracy to be the best regime, as it is compatible to human nature, incorporating elements of communication, interaction, and expression of emotion. Hence, gender and democracy are intertwined according to Prof. Gilligan, since both wish to provide all humans with a voice – their genuine voice. However, there is a separate, and often opposite patriarch narrative, which creates a blatant dichotomy between men and women. This stance is anti-democratic and therefore generates conflicts over status of women worldwide. Prof. Gilligan mentioned the story of Adam and Eve as a case study that epitomizes the fundamental inequality between men and women. In the story, not only Eve is looking after her man by trying to provide him with the fruit that would provide him judgment, but she is also gets blamed by him at the end. In addition, despite death warnings regarding eating the forbidden fruit, it is not before Adam eats it that ramifications apply on both.

Since girls are encouraged to silent their thoughts and desires at a young age, the most common saying among younger girls is "I don't know". Thus, they developed insecurity about their feelings, and most importantly, they believe that they face a choice, with a dreadful tradeoff – giving up their authentic voice, or giving up relationships. Therefore, with older age, women begin an inevitable "natural resistance", to compensate for years of silence and lack of true relationships. Ultimately, this resistance evolves into political resistance. Prof. Gilligan introduced the concept of "radical listening" as a way for individuals, as well as for society as a whole, to find their inner voices which re-attaches body and soul, to live in a more harmonious manner. This, according to Prof. Gilligan is an essential step toward a true democracy.

Lastly, Prof. Gilligan defined Feminism not as a matter exclusively revolving around women, as well as not a battle between men and women, but rather as a global human liberation movement, which pursue equality and real democracy.

The absence of MK's of opposing parties in the room was apparent, to say the least. I strongly believe that some issues, such as gender equality, should enjoy larger consensus and bi-partisan support, if we are to make our mark on Israeli history.