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**Where Religion, High-Tech and Family Meet**

*Written by Yaniv Berman*

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With an average of more than six children per family, the typical haredi (believing in strict rabbinic law) Jewish woman has little time to invest in a career.

Haredi Jews adhere to strict traditional rabbinic authority – and that means being a part of Israel's renowned high-tech industry is all but impossible. The problem for Haredi women, who wish to be part of the industry, is two-fold – the long hours and a working environment which includes men.

A number of outsourcing companies in the local council of Modi'in Illit are trying to overcome these obstacles by creating workplaces which more or less employ only haredi women.

One such company is Talpiot, an offshore development outsourcing center, created by Matrix, an Israeli information technology company.

"The work place of Talpiot is adjusted to fit the Orthodox women," says Talpiot COO Libby Affen.

"When you enter Talpiot, you can see a separate women's kitchen and a separate men's kitchen and the women are seated separately from the men. The work hours are a bit more adjusted to what women in the Orthodox community require," Affen adds.

The women also receive help from the government and the municipality, which subsidizes childcare institutions in Modiin Illit. It is also helpful that the work place is located a short walking distance from home. That way, they can pop in during lunchtime and see the children.

In haredi society, husbands often spend their days studying religious texts, while wives try to provide most of the livelihood. When asked if they would not prefer seeing their husbands working instead of studying Torah, the answer we were given was simple: "Studying Torah is the highest value in our society. I am proud to be able to work in such a job, which enables my husband to concentrate on his studies."

"They are educated to this end from the very beginning," Prof. Tamar El-Or from the Hebrew University's Sociology Department says.

"Their education is meant to make them see their future husband as a Torah-learner. This is what they fantasize about; this is what they want to have," says El-Or.

The policy of the local council is to encourage its women to develop careers and contribute to their families' budgets.

"Haredi women are intelligent and are able to compete in local and international markets," says head of the Local Council of Modi'in Illit, Ya'akov Guterman.

"These women are better educated than the men in the haredi society, who concentrate their efforts on religious studies," he explains.

According to Guterman, "the women study English, math, physics, and that is why it is easier to integrate them into the high-tech world."

Another company which employs haredi women is CityBook Services. Talking to some of the company's employees, their priorities are clear: they all want to further develop their careers in the high-tech world, yet they do not regard themselves as career women.

"Our families," they say, "come above everything else."

"I want to advance myself in my profession, but only as long as my work does not interfere with my family life," says an employee, who wishes to remain anonymous.

"If it means working in the evenings and neglecting my children, then that is where I would draw the line," she says.

Approximately 30,000 people live in Modiin Illit, most of them haredi. Similar to other haredi cities, its socio-economic status is among

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the lowest in Israel.

Modi'in Illit may nevertheless be regarded as a success story. In the past four years, hundreds of women have undergone various courses and have been integrated into the nine high-tech companies in the local council. As a result, the community's economic life has taken a leap forward.

"Until a few years ago there were no commercial centers here and the parking lots were empty," Guterman says. As a result of the sudden employment of hundreds of women, the purchasing power of many families has grown. Commercial centers were built and clothing stores were opened, as well as branches of the large food chains. Most of these new work places are occupied by women from the local community, Guterman says proudly.

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