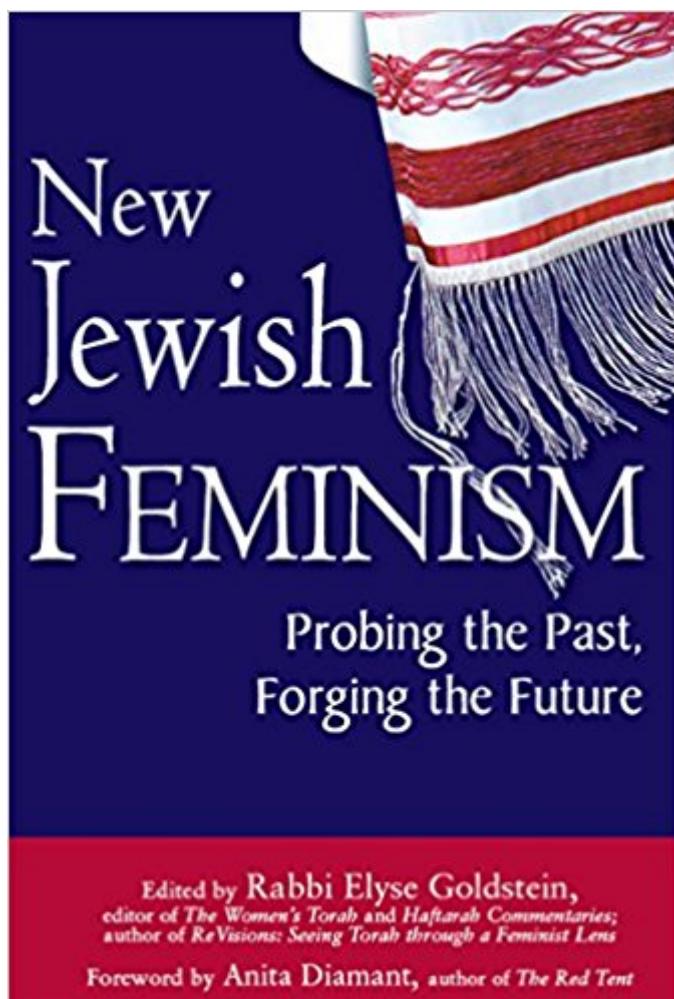


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# New Jewish Feminism: Probing The Past, Forging The Future



## Synopsis

Jewish Feminism: What Have We Accomplished? What Is Still to Be Done? “When you are in the middle of the revolution you can’t really plan the next steps ahead. But now we can. The book is intended to open up a dialogue between the early Jewish feminist pioneers and the young women shaping Judaism today.” Read it, use it, debate it, ponder it.

•from the Introduction This empowering anthology looks at the growth and accomplishments of Jewish feminism and what that means for Jewish women today and tomorrow. It features the voices of women from every area of Jewish life •the Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox and Jewish Renewal movements; rabbis, congregational leaders, artists, writers, community service professionals, academics, and chaplains, from the United States, Canada, and Israel •addressing the important issues that concern Jewish women:

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## Customer Reviews

It is outrageous to think that God relegated women to second class citizenship and outlawed them from a real relationship with the divine. It is beyond belief that there are still people who echo the view of the biblical commentator and philosopher Levi ben Gershon, called Gersonides (1288-1344), that women are subhuman creatures between animals and men. This volume contains thirty-seven essays by thirty six Jewish women, including twenty-two rabbis and a half dozen PhD's, and one man, who writes about men, from all the Jewish denominations. Rabbi Goldstein, the editor, comments in her introduction that radical changes occurred for Jewish women since 1968 when she stood up at her Bat Mitzvah ceremony at age 13 at her Reform Temple and told the congregation that she would be a rabbi. The surprised rabbi rushed to the podium to explain that she certainly meant a rebbetzin (the wife of the rabbi). Undaunted, she replied: Let my husband be the rebbetzin. I'll be the rabbi. The book discloses some of the still existing problems, and raises serious questions. Wouldn't the concept of Torah, Israel, and God change for the better if women are accepted as full participants in Judaism? Doesn't it help if we consider revelation as not being restricted in time and place, to Moses at Sinai, but as ongoing, through rabbinic interpretations derived from ongoing history, as the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, taught? Shouldn't women be encouraged to write more new interpretations of Torah from a feminine perspective to correct the erroneous one-sided views of the past? One of the contributors to this volume stresses that "Jewish women have the power - and the challenge - to bridge the seemingly intractable denominational gaps," and help unite and empower Jews. One of the Orthodox contributors points out that while "it is unthinkable today for Orthodox Jewish families to educate their sons Jewishly but not their daughters," they still fail to give sufficient thought to the content of these educations, and she explains why. She mentions the rather curious practice of many Orthodox families where the wife is required to cover her head and body in long sleeves and over-long dresses, while her husband strolls the public grounds in shorts. The justification for the female restriction is tzniut, "modesty," which seems to be restricted to women. She highlights the terribly devastating practice the total inequality between men and women in marriage and divorce: only males are allowed to effectuate them. A male "acquires" a woman as a wife by saying a certain formula, while the woman who is acquired must stand by silent. In divorces, the situation is far worse. Only a husband can grant a Jewish divorce, called a get. When a husband refuses to hand his wife a get, she is left "chained" to him, the word "chained" is agunah in Hebrew, unable to marry again. There have been many instances where spiteful husbands never releases their "chained" wives from their chains and many husbands who agreed to give the get only if she or her blackmailed family pays him hundreds of thousands of dollars. This is an unconscionable situation,

and rabbis should take steps to change this travesty. A Reform contributor emphasizes that the problem of "women's quest for equality" is also unresolved among more liberal Jews. For example, why retain the traditional marriage contract called the ketubah, which focuses on the husband? The ketubah is a rabbinical invention, is not biblical, and there is no reason why it cannot be updated. Why not develop a brit ahuvim, "a lovers' covenant." A Conservative writer, the movement that is not as traditional as the Orthodox or as liberal as the Reform, outlines the problems facing her movement, including their disallowance of women to serve as witnesses or judges at divorce proceedings because if they did so, the divorce would be rejected by Orthodox Jews who disallow women to serve as witnesses and judges. In summary, the writers demonstrate with many examples that the feminist battle for equality in Judaism, while having made advances, is far from over. They make it clear that beside the pain inflicted upon half of the Jewish people, the world won't achieve what it can achieve until both sexes are treated equally and their skills and energies used in unison.

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