

Jewish feminism essay



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Jewish feminism has had a significant impact on the development and expression of Judaism. They have faced many obstacles and brought about much change in the Jewish tradition. Jewish feminism is a movement that seeks to improve the religious, legal and social role and contribution of women within Judaism. Feminism can be traced back to the early 1970s where women began to question their roles amongst society.

For Jewish women, they wanted to focus on the composition of the minyan, the exemption from some mitzvot, exclusion of women as witnesses of Jewish law and the position of women in relation to divorce proceedings. Each variant has responded differently to feminism and the level of impact as differed amongst Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jews. Judaism is known for being more patriarchal than many other organised religions. This has made it difficult for Jewish feminists to bring about equity and Tzedakah.

Jewish feminists have one main agenda and that is to challenge and fight sexism within Judaism. They see their work as part of their duty to tikkun olam and believe their actions bring Tzedakah to their faith community. Jewish feminism created much controversy as many men thought that it would have a weakening effect on Jewish life, however many would argue that it has been strengthened. Jewish conservative women were amongst the first feminists to challenge the traditional expression of Judaism.

For example, in 1972, ten new york feminists, took the issue of equality for women to the convention of the conservative movement's rabbinical assembly, presenting a document, " Call For Change" which demanded that women be accepted as witnesses before jewish law, be considered as bound

to perform all mitzvot, be allowed full participation in religious observances, have equal rights in marriage and be allowed to initiate divorce, be counted in the minyan and be permitted to assume positions of leadership in the synagogue and within the Jewish community.

In recent years, it has minimised legal and ritual differences between men and women and the Jewish Law committee has approved a number of decisions in relation to this topic. For example, women publicly reading the Torah. This therefore brought about an extreme change and improvement from the previous roles in which women played and assisted the other variants of Judaism to continue or begin to develop their expression as this caused female followers of the Conservative variant to step up and fight for the coming along of the movement.

In response to the calls of its feminists, Reform Jews made significant changes to the development and expression of its branch of Judaism. For example, Reform Judaism has now incorporated the idea of the equality of men and women in their variant. Reform Judaism ignores traditional prohibitions on women's role in Jewish life and holds that women may perform any ritual done by man EG. Being part of the minyan. This may have been as a result of the Conservative feminists introducing "Call for Change" as these feminists as well as all Jewish Feminists seem to have had a major influence in the expression of the current Jewish tradition.

Furthermore, the Orthodox Jewish communities have found the impact of Jewish feminism to be a significant issue for their interpretation of the halakah and how their religion is to be expressed. Orthodox feminism seeks

to improve the position of women in Jewish law, life and leadership. Orthodox feminism does not require precisely equal roles between men and women, nor does it seek to overthrow the religious tradition and substitute new sources and traditions, rather it accepts the possibility that somewhat different approaches may be appropriate for men and women.

It seeks support to improve women's halakhic status, new supplemental traditions, new prayers and customs etc. The Jewish communities believe that women are altering the perceptions and interpretations of the Halakah and believe that women are interested in getting the same rights not for the spiritual reasoning but for the pure want to be equal and therefore feel the respect and high importance is being slowly forgotten.

They therefore believe the ultimate beliefs and importance is being gradually minimised and the rituals and interpretations are being changed for the worse. In conclusion, there are a vast number of impacts of Jewish feminism on the development and expression of Judaism and the various forms and variants of the Jewish religion. All of the above ideas, combine to conclude the positive and negative impacts of Jewish feminism and the ways in which this is affecting the various forms.