

New Jewish Feminism – Probing the Past, Forging the Future.  
Edited by Rabbi Elyse Goldstein with a foreword by Anita Diamant.  
Jewish Lights Publishing 2009.

New Jewish Feminism commences with a ringing paean by Anita Diamant, celebrating the transformation in American Jewish life achieved by Jewish feminists, rabbis and lay people alike. It is followed by a wonderful introduction written by Elyse Goldstein in which, having commenced with a recounting of the impact of her announcement from the bimah at her Bat Mitzvah that she wished to become a rabbi, she considers the many and various ways in which Jewish women have changed modern Jewish life, particularly but not exclusively in the United States.

New Jewish feminism is sub-divided into seven sections: Women and Theology, Women, Ritual and Torah, Women and the Synagogue, Women in Israel, Gender, Sexuality and Age, Women and the Denominations and Leadership and Social Justice. Each section starts with a brief introduction by the editor and contains several essays written by a stellar cast of rabbinic and lay contributors, ranging across the spectrum from the early pioneers like Judith Plaskow to the newest exponents such as Beth Cooper Benjamin and Jodie Gordon of Ma'yan.

The contributors also share a variety of Jewish backgrounds and affiliations, which enriches the book overall and broadens its scope, and the inclusion of essays by Orthodox women, notably Rabbi Haviva Ner-David, ordained as a rabbi by an orthodox rabbi in Jerusalem, is a potent reminder of the truth expressed to me many years ago by Blu Greenberg that the revolution in Orthodox Judaism would be achieved by orthodox women.

This is a wonderful collection of thought-provoking and stimulating essays of high quality, and a reminder of the enormous journey travelled by Jewish women since the 1960s; one tiny regret is that it fails to feature any of the European women, rabbis and lay, who have contributed so much to European Judaism.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh